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TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

A SCHOLARLY AND CRITICAL JOURNAL

Essays on

Doris Lessing

T. S. Eliot

Henry Roth

Ted Tally

Graham Swift

James Joyce

Elizabeth Taylor

VOLUME 35 SPRING 1989 NUMBER 1

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Twentieth Century Literature

A SCHOLARLY AND CRITICAL JOURNAL
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VOLUME 35 SPRING 1989 NUMBER 1

CONTENTS

The Self Is Always an Other: Going the Long Way Home to Autobiography	Ellen Peel	1
Orestes in the Drawing Room: Aeschylean Parallels in T. S. Eliot's "The Family Reunion"	Martha C. Carpentier	17
"The Noisiest Novel Ever Written": The Soundscape of Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*	Stephen J. Adams	43
Tally's *Terra Nova*: From Historical Journals to Existential Journey	Robert J. Andreach	65
History and the "Here and Now": The Novels of Graham Swift	Del Ivan Janik	74
The Encounter in Joyce's "An Encounter"	James P. Degnan	89
"Oh, What a Something Web We Weave": The Novels of Elizabeth Taylor	Jane Brown Gillette	94

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Twentieth Century Literature

A SCHOLARLY AND CRITICAL JOURNAL
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VOLUME 35 SUMMER 1989 NUMBER 2

CONTENTS

The Vision of Light in Ezra Pound's *The Unwobbling Pivot* (Winner of the 1989 *TCL* Prize in Literary Criticism)	MARY P. CHEADLE	113
Thomas Pynchon's Intrusion in the Enchanter's Domain	MICHAEL W. VELLA	131
The Impulse for the Ludic in the Poetics of Raymond Queneau	CONSTANTIN TOLOUDIS	147
Fragments of Redemption: Reading William Gaddis' *JR*	GREGORY COMNES	161
Tomlinson, Ruskin, and Moore: Facts and Fir Trees	RUTH A. GROGAN	183
A Methodology of Reading *Finnegans Wake*	SUSAN SHAW SAILER	195
Poetymologies in Seamus Heaney's *Wintering Out*	HENRY HART	204

Twentieth Century Literature, (ISSN 0041–462X), published four times a year by HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY, Hempstead, New York 11550, considers manuscripts on all aspects of modern and contemporary literature, including articles in English on writers in other languages. It is indexed in *Humanities Index*, *Bibliographic Index*, the *MLA International Bibliography*, the *Arts and Humanities Citation Index*, and other standard sources. Subscription rates: Domestic, $20.00 a year to individual subscribers, $24.00 a year to Institutions; foreign, $24.00 a year to individual subscribers, $28.00 a year to Institutions. Single copies: $7.00 plus $1.00 for foreign orders. Back issues available from Kraus Reprint Co., University Microfilms, Inc., and Johnson Associates, Inc. (microfiche). Second-class postage paid at Albany, New York. POSTMASTER: Send form 3579 to *Twentieth Century Literature*, Boyd Printing Co., Inc., 49 Sheridan Ave., PO Box 1413, Albany, New York 12201-1413. Copyright 1989, Hofstra University. Manuscripts conforming to the *MLA Style Sheet* (2d ed., 1970) should be directed to WILLIAM MCBRIEN, Editor, *Twentieth Century Literature*, HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY, Hempstead, New York 11550. Send change of address and subscriptions to: *Twentieth Century Literature*, Boyd Printing Co., Inc., 49 Sheridan Ave., PO Box 1413, Albany, NY 12201-1413.

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Twentieth Century Literature

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WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS ISSUE
ROBERT FRANCIOSI, *Guest Editor*

CONTENTS

Introduction	ROBERT FRANCIOSI	233
Williams, Eliot, and American Tradition	STEPHEN FREDMAN	235
Engendering History: The Sexual Structure of William Carlos Williams' *In the American Grain*	BRYCE CONRAD	254
The Baroness Elsa Freytag von Loringhoven	WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS	279
"Corridor to a Clarity": Sensuality and Sight in Williams' Poems	WILLIAM MARLING	285
Williams and H. D., or Sour Grapes	BARRY AHEARN	299
American Vernacular: Objectivism, Precisionism, and the Aesthetics of the Machine	HENRY M. SAYRE	310

(Continued on next page)

Twentieth Century Literature, (ISSN 0041–462X), published four times a year by HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY, Hempstead, New York 11550, considers manuscripts on all aspects of modern and contemporary literature, including articles in English on writers in other languages. It is indexed in *Humanities Index*, *Bibliographic Index*, the *MLA International Bibliography*, the *Arts and Humanities Citation Index*, and other standard sources. Subscription rates: Domestic, $20.00 a year to individual subscribers, $24.00 a year to Institutions; foreign, $24.00 a year to individual subscribers, $28.00 a year to Institutions. Single copies: $7.00 plus $1.00 for foreign orders. Back issues available from Kraus Reprint Co., University Microfilms, Inc., and Johnson Associates, Inc. (microfiche). Second-class postage paid at Albany, New York. POSTMASTER: Send form 3579 to *Twentieth Century Literature*, Boyd Printing Co., Inc., 49 Sheridan Ave., PO Box 1413, Albany, New York 12201-1413. Copyright 1990, Hofstra University. Manuscripts conforming to the *MLA Style Sheet* (2d ed., 1970) should be directed to WILLIAM MCBRIEN, Editor, *Twentieth Century Literature*, HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY, Hempstead, New York 11550. Send change of address and subscriptions to: *Twentieth Century Literature*, Boyd Printing Co., Inc., 49 Sheridan Ave., PO Box 1413, Albany, NY 12201-1413.

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The Fading Beautiful Thing of *Paterson* — Nancy K. Barry — 343

William Carlos Williams' Triadic-Line Verse: An Analysis of Its Prosody — Eleanor Berry — 364

Williams' Last Decade: Bridging the Impasse — Christopher MacGowan — 389

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Twentieth Century Literature

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PUBLISHED BY HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY

VOLUME 35 WINTER 1989 NUMBER 4

CONTENTS

Orpheus and Eurydice in the Twentieth Century: Lawrence, H. D., and the Poetics of the Turn	HELEN SWORD	407
For Whom the Bell Tolls and *The Magic Mountain*: Hemingway's Debt to Thomas Mann	WILLIAM ADAIR	429
The Aborted Phone Call: Hasterer's Role in and out of *The Trial*	HENRY B. WONHAM	445
Revolution and Isolation in *La Condition humaine*	JAMES L. KASTELY	458
Among the Hapsburgs: Arthur Griffith, Stephen Dedalus, and the Myth of Bloom	ANDRAS P. UNGAR	480
From Parallels to Paradise: The Lyrical Structure of Cheever's Fiction	ROBERT A. MORACE	502
Index to *Twentieth Century Literature*, Volumes 31–35, 1985–1989	HELEN BAJAN	529

Twentieth Century Literature, (ISSN 0041–462X), published four times a year by HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY, Hempstead, New York 11550, considers manuscripts on all aspects of modern and contemporary literature, including articles in English on writers in other languages. It is indexed in *Humanities Index, Bibliographic Index*, the *MLA International Bibliography*, the *Arts and Humanities Citation Index*, and other standard sources. Subscription rates: Domestic, $20.00 a year to individual subscribers, $24.00 a year to Institutions; foreign, $24.00 a year to individual subscribers, $28.00 a year to Institutions. Single copies: $7.00 plus $1.00 for foreign orders. Back issues available from Kraus Reprint Co., University Microfilms, Inc., and Johnson Associates, Inc. (microfiche). Second-class postage paid at Albany, New York. POSTMASTER: Send form 3579 to *Twentieth Century Literature*, Boyd Printing Co., Inc., 49 Sheridan Ave., PO Box 1413, Albany, New York 12201-1413. Copyright 1990, Hofstra University. Manuscripts conforming to the *MLA Style Sheet* (2d ed., 1970) should be directed to WILLIAM MCBRIEN, Editor, *Twentieth Century Literature*, HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY, Hempstead, New York 11550. Send change of address and subscriptions to: *Twentieth Century Literature*, Boyd Printing Co., Inc., 49 Sheridan Ave., PO Box 1413, Albany, NY 12201-1413.

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We mourn the passing of Richard Hayes, esteemed member of our Editorial Board.

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The Self Is Always an Other: Going the Long Way Home to Autobiography

Ellen Peel

In *Going Home*, Doris Lessing tells of her trip back to Southern Rhodesia, the land where she grew up.[1] At several points she expresses the trace of a wish to return to the place out in the country where her childhood house used to stand: "One of the reasons I wanted to go home was to drive through the bush to the kopje [small hill] and see where the house had been. But I could not bring myself to do it" (p. 45). She goes near the kopje but, significantly, never visits the place itself. A similar pattern structures *Going Home* as a whole: it goes near the author's life story but not close enough to fit easily into the genre of autobiography.[2]

The approach/avoidance pattern has broader meaning as well, for it structures Lessing's entire oeuvre: although much of her writing stretches toward autobiography, nothing she has published would ordinarily be classed in that genre. The mere lack of such a work need not provoke comment; after all, many prolific authors have never written an autobiography. Yet Lessing's case stands out. Her works often include one or more elements that seem autobiographical—she writes in the first person, she writes about places where she has lived and events that she has witnessed, she writes of a character much like herself, or she writes nonfiction. What makes her oeuvre strange is that it ventures so close to the site normally called "autobiography" but does not cross the line. Just as the trajectory of Lessing's Rhodesian trip curves away from the intimate reality of her childhood homesite, so the trajectory of her writing curves away from autobiography as convention-

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ally defined.[3] As we shall see, however, she has her own, unconventional ideas about autobiography, ideas that cast a startling new light not only on *Going Home*, but also on her other works, and on the genre as a whole.

A complex work that has received much less critical attention than it deserves, *Going Home* rewards close study for several reasons, not least among them the depressing similarities between Rhodesia in 1956 and South Africa today. I began this study because I was intrigued by how *Going Home*, giving the initial impression of approaching autobiography, epitomizes the approach/avoidance pattern found in other works by the same author.[4] I wondered if *Going Home* were an autobiography and, if not, what it might be. In either case, might it be a positive achievement rather than a gesture that had fallen short? In order to answer these questions, this essay considers the place *Going Home* occupies in Lessing's oeuvre;[5] discusses her views on autobiography, as illustrated primarily in *Going Home*; and finally speculates on the broader implications of those views.

Going Home is a mostly factual account of a visit the author made in 1956 to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). The book documents the cruelties and absurdities of racism. Of all Lessing's works, this one most closely approaches autobiographical form as commonly conceived, but it too swerves away.

The book gets its chronological armature from the order of Lessing's trip, with flashbacks to her childhood. In this temporal sense, the work is a double reminiscence—of the 1956 trip and of her youth. Because she bases the work's temporal order on her own experience, one might expect the author/narrator to be the protagonist as well. Yet the focus lies elsewhere. *Going Home* consists chiefly of political and economic description, which concentrates on others' lives more than an autobiography would. When the author mentions herself, she usually does so only in passing, while describing where she traveled and whom she interviewed. Her accounts of conversations quote others more than herself. Even references to her childhood tend to emphasize other people or things, such as scenery. When Lessing does write commentary at length, it is to analyze the country's economic, racial, and political problems, not her own. Because she concentrates more on others than on herself, her book is closer to the definition of "memoir" than to that of "autobiography."

Lessing's impersonality has a more easily identified cause in this work than in most of her others: she wrote impersonally because she was writing as a journalist, a necessary role since she could not otherwise

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afford a trip to Africa. It may seem that this circumstance absolutely prevented her from writing anything more personal. Yet her choice cannot be explained away so easily. Her arrangement with the Russian press, for whom she was writing, was so ill-defined and their final version of her work so garbled and censored (as a postscript reveals [p. 252]) that the Russians might not have cared if she had written something more personal than an ordinary report. Even given the impersonality of what Lessing offered the Russian press, she might have been able to offer the English-speaking market a more personal, more autobiographical account of her trip. But the author appears to have chosen actively to eschew the personal and turn toward the memoir form. She seems to have started an autobiographical project without finishing it; readers are motivated to wonder why she started in the first place or why, having started, she did not finish.

A number of other works by Lessing evoke similar puzzlement. A quick sampling of her oeuvre will illustrate how other works resemble, but never become, autobiographies. For instance, the essay "My Father" and the book *Particularly Cats* take a nonfictional perspective but turn the focus away from the author herself.[6] Although the works do record Lessing's reactions to her father and to cats she has known, the emphasis falls on what she is describing, not on her feelings. Both works are only memoirs. *In Pursuit of the English* turns away from the author in a similar way.[7] The narrator is "Doris," who has come to London from Africa, as Lessing did. Yet the immigrant woman shrinks to little more than an eye for observing the English and their foibles. Moreover, although nothing about Doris clashes with facts commonly known about Lessing, this work edges away from memoir and toward fiction, through the use of techniques such as the detailed presentation of long informal conversations, which would provoke doubt if presented as accurate nonfiction.

In contrast to the works discussed so far, the *Children of Violence* series[8] does identify author with protagonist but—as if in compensation—clearly presents itself as fiction.[9] Numerous details of the author's life appear in the novels, as many critics have observed.[10] But in the last book of the series, once the protagonist moves to England and her life starts bearing too close a resemblance to Lessing's life at the time of writing, the novel jumps the autobiographical track and ends with telepathy and a global holocaust. Moreover, the entire series employs third-person narration, further distancing itself from autobiography.

The self is more clearly a concern only in more aggressively fictional works, such as *The Golden Notebook*.[11] This self-reflexive,

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intricate book ruthlessly interrogates the very possibility of telling the truth. The main character frequently meditates on the difficulty of writing accurately about oneself: "When I read my notebooks I didn't recognise myself. Something strange happens when one writes about oneself. That is, one's self direct, not one's self projected. The result is cold, pitiless, judging. Or if not judging, then there's no life in it—yes, that's it, it's lifeless."[12] On the other hand, the very failure to claim accuracy seems to provide the freedom for exploring the personal more deeply. The author has a good deal in common with several characters, including Anna Wulf, who is the protagonist and often the narrator. Furthermore, the protagonist does mostly autobiographical writing, including a diary and a parody of a diary. Through the self-consciously fictional structure and the protestations that one cannot write the truth, the novel downplays any claim to verifiability and becomes free to approach the author's self more closely.

The Memoirs of a Survivor takes a different, but equally ambivalent, stance toward autobiography.[13] *Memoirs* shows certain autobiographical traits even more consistently than *The Golden Notebook*: it is always narrated in the first person and, to the extent that it has a single protagonist, we can say that the protagonist is always the narrator. Moreover, the nameless narrator seems more confident about being able to tell the truth than Anna in *The Golden Notebook*. Yet, as if to offset the proximity to autobiography, *Memoirs* veers away. Autobiographies usually combine author with narrator and protagonist, but *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is the only work by Lessing that we have considered in which the author is linked to neither narrator nor protagonist. Lessing places the story safely far from her own life by setting it in three worlds—a realistic one of the future; a surrealistic, timeless one; and a surrealistic one with mysterious ties to the past of a girl who has come to live with the narrator. Some details of the girl's past, as represented in the third world, recall Lessing's own past, but generally the three worlds are so distanced as to make any claim of autobiographical accuracy impossible. Obviously not a literal account of Lessing's life, *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is freed to have a title that alludes to something akin to autobiography.[14] But even this work does not bear the title *The Autobiography of a Survivor*, for, as I have suggested, the narrator does not concentrate much on herself; the attention given to others by her narrative places it somewhere between autobiography and memoir. It seems that the presence of a title that even approaches autobiography entails the most striking absence of autobiographical claims about the author's self or about nonfiction.

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The examples I have reviewed above show that Lessing's works contain just so much autobiography and no more. When they threaten to take on too much, a safety valve opens. Because the pattern undergoes several variations, her reluctance to exceed a maximum number of autobiographical elements is all the more salient—and puzzling. At this point the detailed analysis of her views on autobiography, as exemplified in *Going Home*, should help solve the riddle.

Lessing has expressed diverse views on autobiography. During a lecture in 1984 she said, "It is almost impossible to write autobiographically. . . ." Calling the first *Children of Violence* novel, *Martha Quest*, her "most autobiographical" work, she nonetheless added, "my parents were not quite like that . . . I was fairly new at my job and was learning as I wrote it."[15] The statement about her parents implies a conventional standard of fidelity to fact (albeit in fiction). On the same lecture tour the author called *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, the novel of future and fantastic worlds, "her 'attempt' at autobiography. . . ."[16] Her astonishing classification of a book that few would even call autobiographical fiction means that we must open ourselves to a more variegated definition of autobiography.

In order to understand her statements, it is essential to understand that she has increasingly come to challenge the very distinction between self and other.[17] Her way of bridging the chasm between the two is to decide that no such absolute chasm exists.[18] For her, the self is always an other, even in ordinary autobiographies.

Two recent essays in *Granta* illustrate how Lessing collapses the distinction between self and other.[19] The *Granta* essays are unusual because they so overtly present her challenge to the self/other distinction. If anyone plays the role of protagonist in the essays, it is her mother, but other family members, including Lessing herself, are also discussed. Although the first essay, "Impertinent Daughters," describes the author's bitter rebellion *against* her mother, the essay also *links* the two women by presenting the mother's equally bitter rebellion against parental authority. The impertinence that separates the two women from each other is also what they have in common. Writing about the impertinence of one evokes the impertinence of the other.

The relationship between the two essays' titles epitomizes how writing about her mother blurs into writing about herself. *Granta*'s table of contents lists the second essay as "Autobiography (Part Two): My Mother's Life." We can interpret the first half of this title to mean that Lessing has once again evaded autobiography, for nothing is called

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"Autobiography (Part One)." Alternatively, the title could imply that "Impertinent Daughters" *was* Part One and, like the second essay, should be read as having more to do with the author than with her mother. Yet how much can the essays concentrate on Lessing if Part Two is subtitled "My *Mother's* Life" (emphasis added)? One could argue that many autobiographies manage to discuss the author's mother while retaining the autobiographical focus on the self. But Lessing's commitment to autobiography is more tenuous, for, interestingly, the title in the table of contents changes by the time it appears on the first page of the essay. It now reads: "My Mother's Life (Part Two)," suggesting that "Impertinent Daughters" was "My Mother's Life (Part One)," and that both essays have more to do with the author's mother than with Lessing herself. The oscillations make it impossible to decide definitively whom the essays are "about"—self or other. The oscillations may make readers uncomfortable but suit Lessing, since she perceives no absolute gap between self and other.

Skepticism about the self/other split pervades Lessing's beliefs—moral, spiritual, political, intellectual.[20] It informs her opposition to racism and parochialism as well as her past or present sympathy with Communism, Sufism (a kind of Islamic mysticism), and psychoanalysis. The relation between self and other runs through all her work, including the recent space fiction, where at one climactic point a group of characters literally merges into one.[21]

Lessing's thoughts about autobiography are rooted in her challenge to the distinction between self and other: "It's impossible to write autobiographically. Or I've always found it so. . . . It's impossible to have an experience that other people haven't had, or aren't having."[22] When Lessing says it is impossible to write autobiographically, she means one cannot write about the self as unique. The task is impossible only in the traditional sense, as expressed by James Olney in *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*. Olney emphasizes "the isolate uniqueness that nearly everyone agrees to be the primary quality and condition of the individual and his experience."[23]

For Lessing, writing about the self inevitably embraces writing about the other, and the reverse is true as well. She does not reject the self in favor of the other but redefines both in such a way that her explanation of why it is impossible to write autobiographically gives equal support to the idea that it is impossible *not* to write autobiographically. Note, however, that she reaches this last point by a route very different from that of writers like Montaigne and Petrarch,

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for whom the self absorbs the other. Lessing, more radically, is challenging the distinction per se.

The introduction to *The Golden Notebook* explains how Lessing's thinking on self and other developed:

> At last I understood that the way over, or through this dilemma, the unease at writing about "petty personal problems" was to recognise that nothing is personal, in the sense that it is uniquely one's own. Writing about oneself, one is writing about others, since your problems, pains, pleasures, emotions—and your extraordinary and remarkable ideas—can't be yours alone. The way to deal with the problem of "subjectivity," that shocking business of being preoccupied with the tiny individual who is at the same time caught up in such an explosion of terrible and marvellous possibilities, is to see him as a microcosm and in this way to break through the personal, the subjective, making the personal general, as indeed life always does. . . .[24]

This part of the introduction is explaining how the apparently personal is also general, whereas in *Going Home* the apparently general is also personal. Although the introduction and *Going Home* come from opposite directions, the introduction provides an excellent gloss on *Going Home*, for both approaches to the question of the personal and the general arrive at the same place.

In fact, *Going Home* itself often presents individuals who typify groups. The author writes, for instance, of a talk she had with "a young Afrikaner" on a plane (p. 18). Her account of their discussion of blacks ends with the young man's comment:

> "But you can't have them going with the women. If I had a sister I wouldn't like. . . ." [final ellipsis in original]
>
> This is the stock South African conversation; and it goes on just as if nothing had happened. (p. 20)

This one young man represents many other people. He is not, he cannot be, unique.

Conversely, the group can represent the individual.[25] To begin with, Lessing has said that everybody is several different people, and she has suggested "that one way of looking at an author's work is to look at the different characters of the author's self in that book."[26] Although she was probably thinking of fiction, the remark suits *Going Home* as well. Several people in the book mirror a different aspect of Lessing just enough for their lives to hint at different possibilities for what she might have become if she had not fled Rhodesian insularity. Consider, for example, her former schoolmate, now a complacent matron (pp. 24–27), or the man "known as a Socialist" but unaware that he has

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turned into an apologist for the whites' economic supremacy (p. 74). These figures illustrate how other people can represent the self. Such people constitute a group because they are Rhodesians, each of whom represents a different trait of the individual, Lessing.

The group can also represent the individual in another sense, when the group is more homogeneous. In a 1969 interview Lessing describes how she has "floated away from the personal. . . . I don't believe any more that I have a thought. There is a thought around."[27] *Going Home* tells of how, after she enters her homeland, she is swept up by patterns of thought that are "around" in Rhodesia:

> Shaking hands becomes an issue. The natural ebb and flow of feeling between two people is checked because what they do is not the expression of whether they like each other or not, but deliberately and consciously considered to express: "We are people on different sides of the colour barrier who choose to defy this society." (pp. 12–13)

As the awkwardness of shaking hands suggests, even when she escapes the prejudiced content of Rhodesian thought, she cannot escape its form—racial self-consciousness. Thus, even when she writes of people who seem to differ from herself, such as prejudiced Rhodesians, she is sometimes displaying her own thought patterns, such as racial self-consciousness.

We have seen how, for Lessing, the individual can represent the group and the group can represent the individual. Her concept is not based on a simplistic belief that everyone is identical and so anyone can represent anyone else. Instead of believing that all the traits of every person are possessed by everyone else, she believes that each trait of every person is possessed by at least one other person. In other words, no trait is *unique* to a particular person, including her. A trait of an individual or a group can be represented by another particular individual or group that possesses that trait, but not by just any other individual or group.

Lessing's notion of the individual and the group is important because it implies that her accounts of other people may indeed be presenting her personal experiences. Writing about others, whether as particular individuals or groups, enables Lessing to write about aspects of her own self. Her absence from center stage in *Going Home* is only apparent; actually her presence permeates the book. Her unconventional joining of self and other implies that Lessing, although apparently only a witness in a memoir, is actually the protagonist in an autobiography.

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Her attitude toward identity, as just described, also has a bearing on the work's truth claims, for a *fictional* individual character may represent a *real* group for her. On this point, as on many others, the writer who most closely resembles her is Honoré de Balzac.[28] For him, to record "the human comedy" in all its variety includes portraying "types" as fictional characters constructed out of the traits common to members of a group of real people. Such characters pervade—even distinguish—Lessing's fiction as well. In her fiction, use of the technique indicates that fact has a role in creating fictional characters. In *Going Home* the same technique indicates that fictional characters have a role in presenting fact.

For instance, in telling of her trip to the Copper Belt of Northern Rhodesia, the author devotes several exasperated but amused paragraphs to "Eileen," whose self-centeredness is equaled only by her naïveté. Whether or not a real person named Eileen ever went husband-hunting "in a tight dress with pink flowers all over it, pink beads, pink sash" (p. 216), the author succeeds in painting the type vividly. When a fictional individual represents a real group, the result may not invite literal verification, but it does have some connection to reality.

We can approach the author's concept of autobiography from another direction, in terms of the opening metaphor of this essay. Lessing can "go home" merely by returning to the homeland of Rhodesians in general, without going to the site of her individual house.[29] We should look more closely at the phrasing in the passage I quoted at the outset: "One of the reasons I wanted to *go home* was to drive through the bush to the kopje and see where the *house* had been. But I could not bring myself to do it" (p. 45, emphasis added). For the passage to make sense, a distinction must exist between driving to "where the house had been" and "going home" to Rhodesia in general. Even though she never goes to the individual spot in the countryside, she goes home nonetheless.

She writes of her first night back in the town of Salisbury:

> The fact is, I don't live anywhere; I never have since I left that first house on the kopje. . . .
>
> But that first house crumbled long ago, returned to the soil, was swallowed by the bush; and so I was glad . . . to get out of the town into the bush.
>
> In five minutes we were there.
>
> And now for the first time I was really home. (pp. 30–31)

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Lessing succeeds in "really" going home by going into the bush, without traveling to the site of her old house.

Note that even if she returned to the kopje, she would never actually see her old house, only the place where it once had stood. Ironically, if the house survived, she might have all the more reason to feel she should resist its individualized lure. Lorna Sage has said of Lessing: "Reviewing other (white) African writers, she has always recognised the same nostalgic taste in the head, and always jealously denied them what she denies herself—belonging, possession. . . . Settling is, for Lessing, displacement mystified and disguised."[30] The nostalgia for personal possession must be resisted.

Now that the house has crumbled, its particular spot can be represented by others, such as the place in the bush just outside Salisbury that makes Lessing feel at home. Now that the center is gone, one member of a group can represent another. The crumbling of the first house evokes the crumbling of the wall between self and other—or the realization that the wall has been porous all along.[31] Lessing's old house disappears irrevocably, as childhood does, and she links the disappearance of childhood with the realization that self and other connect. The introduction to *The Golden Notebook* refers to

> making the personal general, as indeed life always does, transforming a private experience—or so you think of it when still a child, "*I* am falling in love," "*I* am feeling this or that emotion, or thinking that or the other thought"—into something much larger: growing up is after all only the understanding that one's unique and incredible experience is what everyone shares.[32]

Going Home seems to avoid referring to her personally but in actuality presents her self through others, so that, when Lessing writes about them, she is playing the role of protagonist as well as author/narrator. In this expanded sense, *Going Home* indeed *is* about Lessing. Thus the work finally circles around and lives up to the impression it created at the very beginning, the impression that it is an autobiography.

We can now explore the broader implications of Lessing's views. Although I have concentrated on a single book, my analysis suggests routes of inquiry into the many Lessing writings in which, as in *Going Home*, autobiography seems both absent and present. Even her recent space fiction may prove to be more autobiographical than it at first appears. Surely a part of the author is (or will have been) struggling along with macho Ben Ata (*Marriages*), desiccated Ambien II, and weary Johor (*The Sirian Experiments*).[33]

Lessing's ideas also challenge both conventional and feminist

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theories of autobiography. Conventional theories base the genre on the individual self, and the flourishing of autobiography is ordinarily attributed to "the cult of anthropocentric humanism during the Renaissance period."[34] In the same vein, a major essay by Georges Gusdorf, the father of modern criticism of autobiography, at times becomes a paean to the "theodicy of the individual being."[35] How would Lessing react to this stress on individual selfhood? Presumably it would be inimical to a person who has written that "your problems, pains, pleasures, emotions—and your extraordinary and remarkable ideas—can't be yours alone."

In one sense, because feminist theories are skeptical of selfhood, they are more compatible with Lessing's ideas than conventional theories are. While conventional autobiographical theories privilege selfhood, feminist autobiographical theories question it, for feminism in general finds value in otherness. Feminists, most notably Simone de Beauvoir, have investigated how patriarchy constructs man as the absolute, essential self and woman as an incidental, inessential other.[36] Often women share this patriarchal ideology and therefore feel painful ambivalence toward the self, experiencing it partly as otherness. On the more positive side, however, this experience makes some women sensitive to what otherness feels like and teaches them to emphasize respect and reciprocity in dealing with people who in some way are "other" in relation to the self.[37] Thus feminist theorists in general value otherness.

This orientation toward otherness has enabled feminist theorists of autobiography in particular to present various challenges to conventional theories of autobiography, which elevate selfhood. For instance, Carolyn G. Heilbrun argues that "women's self-writings were, until very recently, radically different from men's, and if the contemplation of one's own singularity is critical, scarcely deserve the name of autobiography, but . . . in the last decade women's autobiography has unmistakeably [sic] found its true form."[38] Heilbrun is willing to entertain the possibility that the coherent self is central to the definition of autobiography, but she reveals that such a definition would have a different meaning for women writers. Until recently, the influence of patriarchy (including women's internalization of the view that they were inferior "others") caused female authors to deny both their accomplishment and their suffering.[39] Heilbrun says "that the male 'evolution of the coherent self' has now become possible also for women, but in different ways, and at a different time of life."[40] Thus the standard

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theory of autobiography has never completely encompassed women's writings, even the most recent.

Other feminists criticize theories like Gusdorf's more strongly.[41] One of the best-known feminists to question the conventional idea of the writer's self is Sidonie Smith. She concedes that male autobiography springs from Renaissance ideas of selfhood, but she sees those ideas as lopsided:

> In privileging the autonomous or metaphysical self as the agent of its own achievement and in frequently situating that self in an adversarial stance toward the world, "autobiography" promotes a conception of the human being that valorizes individual integrity and separateness and devalues personal and communal interdependency.[42]

Smith also points out the male orientation of those who trace autobiography to Renaissance ideas of selfhood:

> What I would challenge is the unexamined way in which that history, as it situates the emergence of the genre in a new notion of man, construes the autobiographical subject as always male and thereby ignores the interdependencies of the ideology of gender and the ideology of individualism that spawned the new discursive form.[43]

Since some recent nonfeminist theorists are also beginning "to consider the problematics of selfhood," or even to envisage "the death of the author, after Derrida and most especially Foucault,"[44] it might seem unnecessary to have singled out feminist theorists from the larger group of theorists who are skeptical about selfhood. Domna C. Stanton makes it clear, however, that acknowledging the multiple (or dead) self is not the same as acknowledging the other as many feminists do:

> The female "I" was thus not simply a texture woven of various selves; its threads, its life-lines, came from and extended to others. By that token, this "I" represented a denial of a notion essential to the phallogocentric order: the totalized self-contained subject present-to-itself.[45]

One of the few nonfeminist critics who acknowledge otherness in this way is Mikhail Bakhtin, whose ideas Smith adapts to autobiography:

> The "self" that autobiography inscribes is constituted from the polyphonic voices of discourse, as Mikhail Bakhtin persuasively argues when he challenges much of Western philosophical and psychological discourse about the self. . . . Through the concept of "dialogic imagination," Bakhtin displaces the essentialist ideology of individualism that makes of the "self" an atomized

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> privacy, a unified and unique core isolable from society and "representable" in autobiography.[46]

In these ways, feminist criticism, along with Bakhtinian criticism, replaces solipsism with an alternative: the possibility that one can write about the self without excluding the other.

Lessing's views on self and other are closer to the feminist inclusion of otherness than to the conventional exclusion of otherness. Yet, perhaps surprisingly, even feminist views do not quite encompass Lessing's. She has an idiosyncratic relationship to feminism and, true to form, she does not reject the feminist insight about otherness but transforms it. While feminist theorists stress "personal and communal interdependency" between self and other, Lessing stresses identity between self and other. While feminist theorists say that otherness should be included, Lessing says it is impossible to exclude otherness in the first place.

As we have seen, she challenges the very distinction between self and other. In doing so, she is going much further than both conventional and feminist theorists, for she is challenging the very terms in which they conceive the issue. The conventional "totalized self-contained subject present-to-itself" cannot exist for Lessing, because she believes that the subject cannot be unique, that its traits are always shared with others. Nor can the feminist self, bridging a gap to the other, exist for Lessing, because she believes that the gap does not exist. By redefining self and other, her originality breaks the bounds of current theories of autobiography.

Certainly in *Going Home* and in the rest of Lessing's own oeuvre, we can see that she has not been avoiding the autobiographical form after all. Given her views of the self, she would perceive nothing she could write as more autobiographical than what she has already written. She has already written her own kind of autobiography, going the long way home.

[1] Doris Lessing, *Going Home* (1957; rpt. New York: Popular Library, 1968). Subsequent references will appear in parentheses in the text. I am grateful to Elizabeth Armstrong and Margaret Homans for their comments on this article.

[2] My essay is complemented by Jenny Taylor's essay "Memory and Desire. on Going Home: The Deconstruction of a Colonial Radical," in *Critical Essays on Doris Lessing*, ed. Claire Sprague and Virginia Tiger (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986), pp. 37–44. She expresses similar interests (generic anomalies, the irony of the title, and Lessing's avoidance of her homesite) but then discusses them largely in terms of "formal and ideological tensions" (p. 38) rather than autobiography.

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[3] Perhaps Lessing is cautious about conventionally defined autobiography because it recalls private forms such as the diary and the letter, to which for centuries many women writers were confined. (I am indebted to Ann Snitow for this observation.)

[4] Others have shared my initial impression. Nicole Ward Jouve, for example, calls the book "directly autobiographical" in her essay "Of Mud and Other Matter—*The Children of Violence*," in *Notebooks/memoirs/archives: Reading and Rereading Doris Lessing*, ed. Jenny Taylor (Boston: Routledge, 1982), p. 80.

[5] Some of this section draws on Elizabeth W. Bruss's notion of "identity-value" in "Eye for I: Making and Unmaking Autobiography in Film," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 296–320.

[6] Doris Lessing, "My Father," *Sunday Telegraph* [London], 1 Sept. 1963, rpt. in Doris Lessing, *A Small Personal Voice: Essays, Reviews, Interviews*, ed. Paul Schlueter (New York: Vintage-Random House, 1975), pp. 83–93; and Doris Lessing, *Particularly Cats* (1967; rpt. New York: Fireside-Simon & Schuster, 1978).

[7] Doris Lessing, *In Pursuit of the English* (New York: Popular Library, 1960).

[8] Doris Lessing, *Children of Violence* (1952–69; rpt. London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1965–69). The *Children of Violence* series consists of *Martha Quest*, *A Proper Marriage*, *A Ripple from the Storm*, *Landlocked*, and *The Four-Gated City*.

[9] Perhaps Nancy K. Miller is observing a similar phenomenon when she notes that what is unsaid in certain French women's autobiographies is said in their fiction, and that the two should be read together ("Women's Autobiography in France: For a Dialectics of Identification," in *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, ed. Sally McConnell-Ginet, Ruth Borker, and Nelly Furman [New York: Praeger, 1980], pp. 269–71).

[10] For example, Dorothy Brewster, *Doris Lessing* (New York: Twayne, 1965), p. 11; and Claudia Dee Seligman, "The Autobiographical Novels of Doris Lessing," *Dissertation Abstracts*, 37 (1975), 1544A, (Tufts), *passim*.

[11] Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (1962; rpt. New York: Bantam, 1973).

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 571.

[13] Doris Lessing, *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (New York: Knopf, 1975).

[14] Up to now, I have stressed the difference between memoir and autobiography. Now, however, their similarity must also be recalled: both recount a narrator's memories, whether of others or of the self.

The title of *The Diaries of Jane Somers* also alludes to something akin to autobiography—and eludes it in complex ways (New York: Vintage-Random House, 1984). When Lessing originally published the two novels now combined into *Diaries*, she used the pseudonym "Jane Somers." Even in unmasking herself later, she carefully kept her distance from Somers the writer—who "wrote in ways that Doris Lessing cannot"—and Somers the character—whose creation was influenced, not by Lessing's thoughts of herself, but by thoughts of her mother. To add to the complexity, the author says that Somers "is not my mother" (p. viii).

[15] Ruth Saxton, "The Bay Area," *Doris Lessing Newsletter*, 8, No. 2 (1984), 7. Both sets of ellipses in original.

[16] Roberta Rubenstein, "An Evening at the 92nd Street Y," *Doris Lessing Newsletter*, 8, No. 2 (1984), 6.

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[17] I am grateful to Ann Snitow for her insights on this point.

[18] Lessing's views overlap but do not coincide with those of certain French thinkers in recent decades (cf. Michael Sprinker, "Fictions of the Self: The End of Autobiography," in *Autobiography*, ed. Olney, p. 324). A thorough comparison of Lessing with Jacques Lacan or others is beyond the scope of this essay; suffice it to say that, although Lessing would share the recent French suspicion of the self, she would be equally suspicious of reducing the world to text or discourse.

[19] Doris Lessing, "Impertinent Daughters," *Granta*, No. 14 (1984), 51–68; and Doris Lessing, "Autobiography (Part Two): My Mother's Life," *Granta*, No. 17 (1985), 225–38.

[20] Lessing's treatment of the relation between self and other resembles that in certain spiritual autobiographies by women, though she does not hold conventional religious beliefs (see Carol Edkins, "Quest for Community: Spiritual Autobiographies of Eighteenth-Century Quaker and Puritan Women in America," in *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Estelle C. Jelinek [Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1980], p. 40).

[21] Doris Lessing, *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* (1982; rpt. New York: Vintage-Random House, 1983), pp. 117–19. The relation between self and other echoes in Lessing's famous statement that the *Children of Violence* series "is a study of the individual conscience in its relations with the collective" ("The Small Personal Voice," *Declaration* [London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1957], rpt. in Lessing, *A Small Personal Voice*, ed. Schlueter, p. 14).

[22] C. J. Driver, "Profile 8: Doris Lessing," *New Review*, 1, No. 8 (1974), 23. When Lessing says it is impossible to write autobiographically, she is not referring to the problem that, in certain women's writings, the author paradoxically presents her self as selfless, as having been absorbed by others (Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Selves in Hiding," in *Women's Autobiography*, ed. Jelinek, p. 114). Such absorption would not make sense to Lessing, who questions the very definitions of self and other.

[23] James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 20–21.

[24] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, p. xiii.

[25] Although many authors use the individual to represent the group, fewer use the group to represent the individual, especially when that person is the author.

[26] Saxton, "The Bay Area," p. 7.

[27] Doris Lessing, "Doris Lessing at Stony Brook: An Interview by Jonah Raskin," in *New American Review 8* (New York: New American Library, 1970), rpt. in Lessing, *A Small Personal Voice*, ed. Schlueter, p. 68.

[28] In 1957 Lessing wrote of her admiration for Balzac and the other "great realists" ("The Small Personal Voice," in Lessing, *A Small Personal Voice*, ed. Schlueter, p. 4). Lorna Sage mentions Lessing's "conviction that the realist writer is not a representational writer but a *representative*" (*Doris Lessing* [London: Methuen, 1983], p. 46).

[29] Janet Varner Gunn uses a similar metaphor, "groundedness," in describing autobiography in general: "The question of the self's identity becomes a question of the self's location in a world" (*Autobiography: Toward a Poetics of Experience* [Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1982], p. 23).

[30] Sage, *Doris Lessing*, pp. 17, 18.

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[31] Since Lessing considers *Memoirs of a Survivor* her attempt at autobiography, it is significant that a literally porous wall plays an important role in that book. Through the wall, the protagonist passes to *other* worlds.

[32] Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, p. xiii.

[33] Doris Lessing, *The Marriages between Zones Three, Four, and Five (As Narrated by the Chroniclers of Zone Three)* [New York: Knopf, 1980]; and Doris Lessing, *The Sirian Experiments: The Report by Ambien II, of the Five* (New York: Knopf, 1981).

My analysis can also illuminate other authors' writings, especially works by women and works with a puzzling relationship to autobiography. For instance, this kind of investigation is invited, from the title page on, by Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Vintage, 1960) and *Everybody's Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1937). Lessing's ideas about identity can transform our readings of such problematic autobiographies.

[34] J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), p. 62.

[35] Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," trans. James Olney, in *Autobiography*, ed. Olney, p. 39.

[36] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (1952; New York: Vintage-Random House, 1974), p. xix.

[37] Mary Grimley Mason, "Introduction: Part I," *Journeys: Autobiographical Writings by Women*, ed. Mary Grimley Mason and Carol Hurd Green (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1979), p. xiii.

[38] Carolyn G. Heilbrun, "Woman's Autobiographical Writings: New Forms," *Prose Studies*, 8, No. 2 (1985), 14.

[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[41] For example, Laura Marcus, "Coming Out in Print: Woman's Autobiographical Writings Revisited," *Prose Studies*, 10, No. 1 (1987), 105.

[42] Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987), p. 39.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

[44] Domna C. Stanton, "Autobiography: Is the Subject Different?," in *The Female Autograph*, ed. Domna C. Stanton (New York: New York Literary Forum, 1984), pp. 16, 18.

Following Rimbaud, Philippe Lejeune entitles his study of autobiography *Je est un autre* (*Je est un autre: L'autobiographie de la littérature aux médias* [Paris: Seuil, 1980]). This sounds like Lessing, but in fact Lejeune's book deals with special forms of autobiography, such as oral histories and autobiographies written in the third person. By limiting his scope to borderline examples, Lejeune avoids Lessing's more radical question, whether the self is always an other, even in ordinary autobiographies.

[45] Stanton, "Autogynography," p. 16.

[46] Smith, "Poetics of Women's Autobiography," p. 48.

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Orestes in the Drawing Room: Aeschylean Parallels in T. S. Eliot's "The Family Reunion"

Martha C. Carpentier

Persistence of the critical assumption that Eliot failed to render classical themes and conventions meaningful in a modern setting has prevented a detailed comparison of *The Family Reunion* with the *Oresteia*, but without such a comparison, Eliot's aims can hardly be understood, let alone condemned. Reviewers following opening night in March 1939 felt emphatically that "Christian and pagan do not mix."[1] They found the chorus alienating and the Eumenides, "embodiments of remorse and thwarted spiritual aspirations" impossible to accept as "guiding angels which must be welcomed and followed."[2]

Indeed, criticism through the years has focused so completely on Eliot's failure to "transform" the avenging Erinyes into benevolent Eumenides, as Aeschylus did so magnificently, that other Aeschylean parallels have been virtually ignored. Maud Bodkin, a more knowledgeable classicist than other early reviewers, attempted to answer this criticism in her review by finding the Erinyes' traditional role as "pursuers that avenge not private but communal crime" a fitting symbol for the modern age, then enduring the "horror" of World War II.[3] However, Bodkin's defense of Eliot's Eumenides broke down in a longer study two years later because, contrary to her original idea, the play is not about "communal crime," but rather an individual conscience haunted by an individual sin.[4]

Later criticism has not come much nearer to surmounting these difficulties. Like Bodkin, F. O. Matthiessen feels that "Eliot could not contrive to endow his Eumenides with any of the collective significance

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that they possessed for the Greeks," so they fail as an objective correlative for Harry's experience.[5] Grover Smith provides the most cogent explanation of Eliot's Eumenides as "ghosts" personifying Harry's "animosity toward both his mother and his wife," thus becoming "the redemptive power of Harry's neurotic obsessions"; however, he too believes that "Eliot's debt to the *Oresteia* . . . is less even than most critics have conceded."[6]

Those who emphasize Eliot's Christian theme have provided the most sympathetic interpretations of *The Family Reunion*. Since they submerge Hellenic parallels under Harry's Christian quest to escape the "love of created beings," they are able to avoid many of the difficulties encountered by earlier critics. For instance, David E. Jones easily dismisses analogies between the *Oresteia* and *The Family Reunion*, since "even where the parallel is closest, the action is transformed in the light of Christian dispensation."[7] Carol H. Smith also believes that "all of the Greek sources which Eliot has used" appealed to him primarily because they seemed "rich in . . . Christian meaning." Like Jones, she finds "in *The Family Reunion*, the curse on the house of Atreus becomes original sin, and the father being revenged becomes the heavenly Father." The Eumenides present no stumbling block to her interpretation, because they signify a spiritual reality that is "more real than the illusions which the world imposes" and are thus necessary guides in "the self-inflicted ordeal of the mystic path." While the *Oresteia* and *The Family Reunion* share "the theme of purgation," Smith decides that "attempts to push the analogies further" encounter too many "difficulties. . . . Nor have the scenes involving Mary, Agatha, and Dr. Warburton counterparts in the *Oresteia*."[8]

But if Eliot "converts the Greek plot into Christian terms," how, then, to explain the rich pagan imagery of the play and its dearth of Christian symbols and language? In her seminal study, *T. S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice*, Smith convincingly establishes the influence of F. M. Cornford's *Origin of Attic Comedy* on Eliot's dramatic fragment "Sweeney Agonistes." Although it was written some thirteen years later, she finds *The Family Reunion* also "patterned on" F. M. Cornford's Frazerian "ritual plot with its agon between the sin-laden and impotent representative of the old year and the reborn and sin-free god of the new year." For Smith, "Amy represents the old principle which must be destroyed before the new principle can be born," symbolic of the demise of winter and the coming of the new agricultural year. "Harry's identification with the spirit of the new year struggling for rebirth," she finds "clear" in the scene with Mary, where "he uses the imagery of the

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ritual sacrifice of rejuvenation."[9] In the conclusion of this scene, however, Harry explicitly rejects the physical renewal offered by Mary through spring fertility imagery.

Eliot's long fascination with "the symbolic meaning of murder," expressed in Harry's imagined murder of his wife, Smith explains "by the ceremonial meanings of murder in the fertility rituals where the god-figure was actually mutilated or dismembered in order to purify him of the iniquities acquired in his sojourn among men," and parallels this with "Christ's Passion, Crucifixion, and Resurrection."[10] However, she stretches Cornford's terms too far in order to align Hellenic fertility ritual with Christian morality and redemption. There was no concept of "sin" in ancient rituals of seasonal death and renewal, and the notion of a god acquiring "iniquities in his sojourn among men" would have been alien to the primitive mind, which did not perceive of spirituality as necessarily morally superior to physicality.

Amy is not only "the old principle which must be destroyed before the new principle can be born," she is Harry's mother. By using Cornford's annual fertility "agon" to explain the Hellenic imagery of *The Family Reunion* Smith overlooks this crucial point. In Cornford's theory both "agonist" and "antagonist" in the ritual battle between old year and new are male—sometimes father and son—just as Frazer's dying god, "mutilated and dismembered" in order to be reborn anew with the spring, is always male. In fertility rituals the mother is never killed—that would be a contradiction of the very purpose of the ritual, which is to ensure her fertility. Yet Eliot's fascination with murder always centered on women and Harry's imagined murder of his wife is, in fact, his first step toward psychically "murdering" or freeing himself from his mother, for, as Bodkin suggests, the wife was merely a substitute, "a sinister clutching figure, a shadow, as it were, and duplicate of the mother."[11]

To be "liberated from the human wheel," Harry must first confront the ties binding him to the controlling mother who "has only lived for your return to Wishwood." Like Orestes he must be "liberated" from the pattern of family tragedy, if he is to be free to pursue his spiritual calling. By reducing Amy merely to a representative of old age, Smith ignores the powerful role women play in *The Family Reunion* and the *Oresteia*, for in both a man's destiny is first dominated and blighted, then resolved by women.

While both these plays tell of a son's defense of and identification with the father, they are dominated by female archetypes. First rapacious witch figures enforce the matriarchal blood-ties of the earth

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mother; they are then superseded by a purely spiritual goddess without ties to the "dark earth," a patroness who resolves the violence of retributive blood-law. *The Family Reunion* is, in fact, a denial of the cyclical physical renewal promised through fertility rituals such as Cornford describes. By the time Eliot wrote it, his interest had long since progressed from Cornford's ritual origins underlying Aristophanic comedy, to the heroic themes of Greek tragedy. It is modeled on the trilogy in which the laws and customs of the old matriarchal, earth-bound religion are emphatically superseded by a patriarchal religion of the spirit in which godhead is above nature. And, like Aeschylus, Eliot confronts and resolves a matricidal impulse that is as profoundly and universally human as the oedipal impulse.

Not only are the two works analogous in such broad thematic ways, but, contrary to Smith's assumption, the scenes involving Mary, Agatha, and Dr. Warburton all have "counterparts" in the *Oresteia*. Amy is clearly parallel to Clytemnestra. A great villainous character must have motives that, at least in their origin, compel our sympathy, and this is true of both these towering matriarchs. Clytemnestra had just cause to hate Agamemnon: he sacrificed their eldest daughter, Iphigeneia, to placate the winds to carry his troops to Troy on a mission of war, folly, and heroism that utterly drained his community. In avenging her daughter's death Clytemnestra defends the matriarchal system, in which bonds of blood take precedence over any other ties, including marriage. When Apollo challenges the Chorus of Erinyes persecuting Orestes, they reply that it is their "duty" to "drive matricides out of their house," but that Clytemnestra's murder of her husband is not similarly punishable because it is not "the shedding of kindred blood."[12] Again, when Orestes asks during his trial why the Erinyes did not "descend" on his mother for the murder she committed, they reply:

> CHORUS
> The man she killed was not of blood congenital.
>
> ORESTES
> But am I then involved with my mother by blood-bond?
>
> CHORUS
> Murderer, yes. How else could she have nursed you beneath her heart? Do you forswear your mother's intimate blood?
> (*O*, p. 156)

Aeschylus' purpose, ultimately, is to refute the predominance of matriarchal blood-bonds by asserting the greater power of Athenian law and Olympian Zeus, but in the earlier phase of civilization that gave rise

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to the matriarchal system, ties of blood reigned supreme and lineage was traced through the mother because physical survival was man's primary struggle. Amy, too, is a great matriarch, upholding the primal importance of physical regeneration:

> AMY
> I do not want the clock to stop in the dark.
> If you want to know why I never leave Wishwood
> That is the reason. I keep Wishwood alive
> To keep the family alive, to keep them together,
> To keep me alive, and I live to keep them.
> You none of you understand how old you are
> And death will come to you as a mild surprise,
> A momentary shudder in a vacant room.
> Only Agatha seems to discover some meaning in death
> Which I cannot find.[13]

The last two lines hint early in the play at Agatha's association with Aeschylus' Athena, "daughter of Olympian Zeus, / she who was never fostered in the dark womb" of any earth mother (*O*, p. 157). Agatha, like Athena, is aligned throughout the play with a patriarchal godhead. Here she is able to find life after death in the spiritual eternity promised by God the Father, unlike Amy, who sacrifices everything to propagation in order to defy death through physical renewal, "Forcing sons upon an unwilling father." In the magnificent opening scene of the last act, these two female principles finally collide, as Amy accuses Agatha of taking her husband and her son:

> AMY
> . . . You knew that you took everything
> Except the walls, the furniture, the acres;
> Leaving nothing—but what I could breed for myself,
> What I could plant here. Seven years I kept him,
> For the sake of the future, a discontented ghost,
> In his own house. What of the humiliation,
> Of the chilly pretences in the silent bedroom,
> Forcing sons upon an unwilling father? . . . .
> I *would* have sons, if I could not have a husband: . . .
> I forced myself to the purposes of Wishwood. . . .
> (*FR*, p. 282)

Amy's language shows her matriarchal principles: Agatha took everything of a spiritual nature, including her husband's love, but left the material objects that ensure familial prosperity and symbolize physical regeneration, "the walls, the furniture, the acres." For these, for the futurity of Wishwood, Amy, as earth mother, "forced herself,"

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to "breed" and to "plant." And, like Clytemnestra when Agamemnon returned with Cassandra, Amy had to endure her husband's love for another.

Yet, while their original cause is just, both Clytemnestra and Amy become mothers who try to control too much, so that their righteous defense of fecundity becomes perverted into a dominating will that corrupts and destroys. Clytemnestra's cause begins in defense of familial ties that Agamemnon violated, but ultimately her will crushes the husband whom ten years of war could not defeat, and destroys the family it is her duty as matriarch to protect. She has already exiled her son before Agamemnon's return, so that she can enact her revenge and rule Argos without interference, with her lover Aegisthus. When Agamemnon returns, he protests that his wife's "lust for conflict is not womanlike," but she easily dominates him in argument, persuading him to tempt the gods' ire by treading on the purple robe that becomes "the folded web's / entanglement" with which she "pinions him . . . in the watered bath" (*O*, pp. 64, 70). Indeed, after stabbing Agamemnon, she glories in his death in words that perversely parody spring fertility ritual:

> CLYTEMNESTRA
> Thus he went down, and the life struggled out of him;
> and as he died he spattered me with the dark red
> and violent driven rain of bitter savored blood
> to make me glad, as gardens stand among the showers
> of God in glory at the birthtime of the buds.
> (*O*, p. 80)

Orestes displays "this net that caught a man" in disgust after he has avenged his father, appealing to a patriarchal godhead, "the great father who sees all, the Sun" to "look on my mother's sacrilegious handiwork":

> ORESTES
> But she, who plotted this foul death against the man
> by whom she carried the weight of children underneath
> her zone, burden once loved, shown hard and hateful now,
> what does she seem to be? Some water snake, some viper
> whose touch is rot even to him who felt no fang
> strike, by that brutal and wrong daring in her heart.
> (*O*, pp. 128–29)

His words show the perversion of Clytemnestra from the mother who gives life, carrying "the weight of children beneath her zone," to the "viper whose touch is rot," bringing death and corruption. "Even to

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him who felt no fang" refers to himself, since he was not stabbed, but his life was nonetheless blighted by "that brutal and wrong daring in her heart." Similarly, Harry tries to explain "the filthiness" with which he has been infected: "I can clean my skin, / Purify my life, void my mind, / But always the filthiness, that lies a little deeper" (*FR*, p. 269). Clytemnestra forced Agamemnon to bend to her will, just as Amy extracted an emotional revenge for a loveless marriage, entrapping her husband for seven years, "Forcing sons on an unwilling father." Like Orestes, Harry has been contaminated by his mother, by her "putrescent embraces" and the "unspoken voice of sorrow in the ancient bedroom" (*FR*, pp. 277, 234).

Argos is subject to Clytemnestra's tyranny, and so too the Monchensey family convenes obediently at Wishwood, "at Amy's command, to play an unread part / in some monstrous farce, ridiculous in some nightmare pantomime" (*FR*, p. 231). The "nightmare pantomime" is Harry's forced accession to family head, which Amy has planned as part of her birthday celebration. After "thirty-five years designing his life" and "eight years watching, without him, at Wishwood," she makes one final effort to coerce Harry to her will, as she did his father: "For the sake of the future: Harry is to take command at Wishwood" (*FR*, pp. 283, 230). The pathos of Amy's character lies in its terrific irony: the very futurity she fought so relentlessly to ensure has been blighted through her own "indomitable will," as the chorus sings:

> CHORUS
> And the wings of the future darken the past, the beak and claws
> have desecrated
> History. Shamed
> The first cry in the bedroom, the noise in the nursery, mutilated
> The family album, rendered ludicrous
> The tenants' dinner, the family pic-nic on the moors. Have torn
> The roof from the house, or perhaps it was never there.
> And the bird sits on the broken chimney. I am afraid.
> (*FR*, pp. 256–57)

Such bird imagery signifies the archetypal witch. According to Jane Harrison, another "Cambridge Anthropologist" like Cornford, whose work in Greek myth and ritual Eliot knew well, all the winged women-demons—Harpies, Gorgons, Sirens, and Erinyes—evolved out of generic "*keres*," primitive chthonic spirits who brought both evil and good to mankind.[14] These triplicate sister divinities evolved from the destructive *keres* into witches, separate from the life-giving mother, but

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an undeniable part of the matriarchal pantheon, just as death is the inevitable corollary of life: "the bird-woman became a death-demon, a soul sent to fetch a soul, a Siren that lures a soul" to its death.[15] Amy has "long since settled" Harry's future, but under the dark wings of her domination, the past, blighted and "shamed," can only be repeated. The "beak and claw" of her ravenous greed have "desecrated" familial "history," "mutilated" and "torn" the very traditions she sought to preserve. She has destroyed Wishwood itself, or "perhaps it was never there"—perhaps it was never the bastion she imagined and tried so single-mindedly to re-create. "And the bird sits on the broken chimney"—like the nightingales excreting on Agamemnon's shroud in "Sweeney among the Nightingales," this destructive female archetype sits upon a "broken" phallic symbol. So, too, Clytemnestra, "Standing above the corpse, obscene / as some carrion crow she sings / the crippled song and is proud" (*O*, p. 83).

There is another child in this family whose future has been blighted by the mother's "indomitable will": Mary, Harry's second cousin, who lived with him as a child and therefore functions in part as a sister figure, analogous to Electra. While Orestes, a son who might command power in Argos, had been exiled, Electra, a harmless daughter, was "kennelled like a dog," imprisoned in her own house like a "slave" (*O*, pp. 97, 108). Like Electra, Mary is too weak to fight and remains a prisoner of Amy's schemes, "a housekeeper-companion": "What Cousin Amy wants, she usually gets. . . . / I suppose I could have gone, if I'd had the moral courage, / Even against a will like hers" (*FR*, p. 245).

The second scene of Part I, in which Harry and Mary meet and share what Eliot called a "lyrical duet," is analogous to the first scene of the *Choephoroi*, in which Orestes returns after his years of exile and meets Electra by the grave of their father. He is disguised and Electra expresses her fear in the recurrent metaphor of deception so central to the trilogy: "Is this some net of treachery, friend, you catch me in?" Orestes replies, sealing their mutual identification: "Then I must be contriving plots against myself," and brother and sister gain strength through sharing their mutual suffering:

> ORESTES
> Zeus, Zeus, direct all that we try to do. Behold
> the orphaned children of the eagle-father, now
> that he has died entangled in the binding coils
> of the deadly viper, and the young he left behind . . .
> I, with my sister, whom I name, Electra here,

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stand in your sight, children whose father is lost.
We both are
driven from the house that should be ours.

(*O*, pp. 101–02)

In this scene Orestes and Electra, too, share a lyrical duet, "a song sung to the gods beneath us," praying to their father's ghost to aid their revenge. This "great invocation of the dead, is in short a species of sacrament, the appointed means of entering into communion with the unseen world."[16] While Orestes calls on his father to join him in "battle on the side of those / you love," Electra begs for his pity, in a splendid reversal of the net imagery, from death to life:

ELECTRA
Hear one more cry, father, from me. It is my last.
Your nestlings huddle suppliant at your tomb: look forth
and pity them, female with male strain alike.
Do not wipe out this seed of the Pelopidae.
So, though you died, you shall not yet be dead, for when
a man dies, children are the voice of his salvation
afterward. Like corks upon the net, these hold
the drenched and flaxen meshes, and they will not drown.

(*O*, p. 111)

Mary and Harry also share mutual identification in discovering that both have suffered alike under Amy's rule, and each finds strength through acknowledging this shared experience. At first, like Orestes and Electra, they seem alien and unsure, unknown to one another. Mary, afraid of Harry's desire to speak with her, awkwardly attempts to leave the room, but he detains her:

HARRY
. . . There was something
I wanted to ask you. I don't know yet. . . .
It seems I shall get rid of nothing,
Of none of the shadows that I wanted to escape;
And at the same time, other memories,
Earlier, forgotten, begin to return
Out of my childhood. I can't explain.
But I thought I might escape from one life to another,
And it may be all one life, with no escape. Tell me,
Were you ever happy here, as a child at Wishwood?

MARY
Happy? not really, though I never knew why:
It always seemed that it must be my own fault,
And never to be happy was always to be naughty.
But there were reasons: I was only a cousin

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Kept here because there was nothing else to do with me.
I didn't belong here. It was different for you.
And you seemed so much older. We were rather in awe of you—
At least, I was.

(*FR*, p. 247)

Both express a sense of imprisonment. One child departed and one remained, but both were similarly caught in the net of familial tragedy. Like Orestes, Harry finds there is "no escape" from the "shadows" of the past that haunt his life, and he must return to battle them, and Mary, like Electra, finds herself "kept here because there was nothing else to do with me." Again like Electra, Mary is slow to trust, in "awe" of the hero she has idolized over the years, but Harry, like Orestes, seals their identification in mutual suffering, by using the first-person plural pronoun, which Mary then echoes:

HARRY
Why were we not happy?

MARY
Well, it all seemed to be imposed upon us;
Even the nice things were laid out ready,
And the treats were always so carefully prepared;
There was never any time to invent our own enjoyments. . . .

HARRY
. . . I was part of the design
As well as you. . . .
. . . But do you remember

MARY
The hollow tree in what we called the wilderness

HARRY
Down near the river. That was the block house
From which we fought the Indians. . . .

MARY
It was the cave where we met by moonlight
To raise the evil spirits.

HARRY
. . . Of course we were punished for being out at night
After being put to bed. But at least they never knew
Where we had been.

(*FR*, p. 248)

While beautifully evocative of childhood, the imagery here is also richly pagan. The children had discovered the real "wishwood," the

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"sacred wood" where they shared "a species of sacrament . . . entering into communion with the unseen world," calling up underground *keres* from the "cave," "evil spirits" of the dead, but also bringers of life. Had they been left to "invent their own enjoyments," they might have eventually found love, marriage, sexual union, and the regeneration of Wishwood, as a natural result of their shared, "secret" world in the wilderness symbolic of fertility. However, Amy decimates this wood in her effort to control the children, to bend them to her will, an example of Eliot's poignant irony. The mother who wishes for Wishwood's continuity above all else, in fact destroys the seeds of its renewal. Like Clytemnestra, her dominating will has perverted her from the purposes of fertility into a harbinger of sterility:

MARY
They never found the secret.

HARRY
Not then. But later, coming back from school
For the holidays, after the formal reception
And the family festivities, I made my escape
As soon as I could, and slipped down to the river
To find the old hiding place. The wilderness was gone,
The tree had been felled, and a neat summer-house
Had been erected, "to please the children."
It's absurd that one's only memory of freedom
Should be a hollow tree in a wood by the river.
(*FR*, p. 248)

Mary, like Electra, gains strength from this reunion. Her despair, an "ordinary hopelessness" that has enveloped her life under Amy's dominion, gives way to a "hope" she tries to share with Harry:

MARY
That sudden comprehension of the death of hope
Of which you speak, I know you have experienced it,
And I can well imagine how awful it must be.
But in this world another hope keeps springing
In an unexpected place, while we are unconscious of it.
(*FR*, p. 249)

It is significant that for Mary "hope keeps springing," like the regeneration of spring itself, "in *this* world," the physical world, earth with its promise of annual renewal. While Orestes' prayers, as quoted above, are focused on the bloody battle he must face, Electra sees beyond revenge to future life, to the "seed of the Pelopidae," made suddenly possible should Orestes finally end the familial curse. Orestes calls on "Earth" to release his father's spirit to aid him in battle, while

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Electra responds in turn, "Persephone, grant still the wonder of success" (*O*, p. 110). By calling on Persephone, Electra evokes all the manifold symbolic richness of that goddess: like her brother, she wants the Queen of the Dead to grant them the power of ghosts below, but unlike Orestes, she invokes "the wonder of success," the wonder of renewed life that Persephone also signifies in her annual return from the underworld. For Electra "children are the voice of salvation" after death, and with Orestes' return she discovers her own identity, hitherto blighted by her mother's domination, as the archetypal Kore, Persephone, the maiden who holds the possibility of futurity in her womb.

Mary, too, is a Kore, who finds her identity with Harry's return. She is equated with Persephone through her association, from the moment she enters the stage, with spring and flowers:

Scene II

[Enter Mary with flowers.]

MARY
The spring is very late in this northern country,
Late and uncertain, clings to the south wall.
The gardener had no garden-flowers to give me for this evening.
. . . . . .
I had rather wait for our windblown blossoms,
Such as they are, than have these greenhouse flowers
Which do not belong here, which do not know
The wind and rain, as I know them.

(*FR*, p. 244)

Mary embodies the spirit of the wilderness, of the free "windblown blossoms," as opposed to Amy's forced, sterile "greenhouse flowers . . . which do not know / The wind and rain, as I know them." Persephone's abduction by Hades occurred when she was picking flowers during "*Anthesterion*, the Flower Month, roughly our February, but in Greece the cold winter season when bulbs bloom," and, as Amy's opening words indicate, the time of the play's events: "Will the spring never come? I am cold" (*FR*, p. 225).[17]

In her newfound identity as Kore, Mary urges Harry to abandon his "infatuation" with "loathing" and turn from hate to love, from death to life. He describes her "voice" in metaphors appropriate to her as nature goddess: "the distant waterfall in the forest" and the "usual noises / In the grass and leaves, of life persisting," and he is both attracted and frightened by the springtime renewal she offers: "Perhaps you are right, though I do not know / How you should know it. Is the

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cold spring / Is the spring not an evil time, that excites us with lying voices?" Here we are reminded that "April is the cruelest month"—cruel because physical birth leads inexorably to death.[18] Spring "excites us" with the promise of new birth, but "with lying voices," for death lies hidden in its wake.

HARRY
Spring is an issue of blood
A season of sacrifice
And the wail of the new full tide
Returning the ghosts of the dead
Those whom the winter drowned
Do not the ghosts of the drowned
Return to land in the spring?
Do the dead want to return?
(*FR*, p. 251)

Contrary to our usual associations of spring with new life, according to Harrison, the Greek month *Anthesterion* and the equivalent Roman February were both "given over to the service of the dead." "February was the month of the dead, and it was the month of purification," which meant sacrificing a ritual "victim" to "placate ghosts or underworld powers," the "evil spirits that impair fertility."[19] Thus, Harry's words do not merely signify an obsession with morbidity, but reveal Eliot's deep knowledge of spring ritual in the ancient world. The dead do "want to return" in spring—the "wail of the new full tide" of life brings "ghosts of the dead" rising up, demanding vengeance for their death.

Harrison explains that "the ghost demands blood, not to satisfy a physical, but so to speak a spiritual thirst, the thirst for vengeance."[20] Harry chants, "Spring is an issue of blood" because the suppliant can only be purified by washing in the blood of the sacrificial victim, just as Orestes ritually cleansed himself of "the bloody hand" of murder by washing in "blood from a young victim" mixed with "running waters" (*O*, p. 151). Harrison is clear that such purification to the ancients contained no notion of sin in a Christian sense: "Purity was not *spiritual* purity in our sense—that is foreign to any primitive habit of thought. . . . But the purity of which the ancients knew was . . . freedom from bad spirits and their maleficent influence."[21] Orestes washes, not because he is guilty of the sin of murder, but because he will be harassed by vengeful ghosts if he does not rid himself of "the smell of human blood," as the Erinyes cry: "like hounds after a bleeding fawn, we trail / our quarry by the splash and drip of blood" (*O*, p. 144).

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In the first five lines of the next verse, Mary reminds Harry that the ultimate purpose of all this bloody sacrifice is fertility, that "pain" and "joy" are inextricably bound, and again she is reminiscent of Persephone, mythic personification of the simultaneity of life and death:

MARY
Pain is the opposite of joy
But joy is a kind of pain
I believe the moment of birth
Is when we have knowledge of death
I believe the season of birth
Is the season of sacrifice. . . .
(*FR*, p. 251–52)

Persephone experiences death and sexuality simultaneously during her sojourn in the underworld, where she eats pomegranate seeds symbolic of insemination, then returns from the world of the dead to be reunited with her mother in spring, symbolically and ritually reassuring man of his immortality. For Mary, as a Kore, the eternal physical cycle of life out of death and death out of life is sufficient, and she wants to draw Harry back into the "hollow tree" of the natural world that they shared as children. However, her imagery in the final seven lines of their "lyrical duet" suggests a birth out of this teeming natural world that is monstrous:

MARY
For the tree and the beast, and the fish
Thrashing itself upstream:
And what of the terrified spirit
Compelled to be reborn
To rise toward the violent sun
Wet wings into the rain cloud
Harefoot over the moon?
(*FR*, p. 252)

These lines are reminiscent of Yeats's "Second Coming," and Eliot seems to be comparing Mary's vision to Yeats's pagan "*Spiritus Mundi*," the vast Sphinx rising out of the desert to replace Christianity, "while all about it / Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds."[22] Mary asks an unanswered question, revealing her own doubt: "what of the terrified spirit" of nature? It seems helplessly "compelled to be reborn" over and over again, a pointless cycle, for Eliot, without Christ to give life meaning beyond death. However confidently Mary urges Harry to share the maternal world of physical rebirth that she desires, she herself doubts its ultimate meaning. This beast, with its "wet wings" and

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"harefoot," suggests an apocalyptic vision of the taloned, winged bird-woman, condemned to, and "terrified" of, an eternity of meaningless cyclical rebirth, round and round the natural world.

Mary's promise of regeneration brings Harry a brief moment of light, "news / Of a door that opens at the end of the corridor, / Sunlight and singing." He is tempted to join her in "singing and light," but he is prevented by the sudden appearance of the Eumenides:

> HARRY
> That apprehension deeper than all sense,
> Deeper than the sense of smell, but like a smell
> In that it is indescribable, a sweet and bitter smell
> From another world. I know it, I know it!
> More potent than ever before, a vapour dissolving
> All other worlds, and me into it.
>
> (*FR*, p. 252)

The Eumenides seem to be described through the metaphor of incense in Catholic and Anglican worship, "a sweet and bitter smell / From another world" of Christian eternity beyond the world of physical sensation, bringing an "apprehension deeper than all sense," and dissolving "all other worlds," certainly the physical world. Harry may have shared "the imagery of the ritual sacrifice of rejuvenation" with Mary, as Carol H. Smith notes, but only momentarily, for he rejects her and the world of pagan fertility she represents in terms that seem unnecessarily cruel, but stem from his own "terror" of the physical futurity she offers: "If I had realised / That you were so obtuse, I would not have listened / To your nonsense. Can't you help me? / You're of no use to me. I must face them" (*FR*, p. 253).

The dual pagan/Christian role of the Eumenides here does seem most contradictory. How can these representatives of ancient matriarchal religion be turning Harry away from Persephone to Christ? The point is, they lead him first to Wishwood, to his mother, to Mary, and finally to Agatha, but only as steps in a progressive spiritual liberation. Eliot delineates them with Erinyean attributes, "sleepless hunters . . . their claws distended," because they drive Harry toward the female archetypes he must confront, just as Orestes must be tried for matricide, in order to be purged and liberated (*FR*, pp. 252–53). In the same speech Harry describes them through Christian metaphor because they are also beneficent Eumenides—as in Aeschylus' version, they ultimately affirm the will of a patriarchal god—leading Harry to and beyond the world of maternal, physical ties toward his spiritual vocation.

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The next step in Harry's pilgrimage occurs in his confrontation with Dr. Warburton, the first scene of Part II. The old doctor, who "looked after all the boys / When they were children," has been called in by Harry's family, worried about his "dangerous fancies" that he has killed his wife (*FR*, pp. 235–37). In Carol H. Smith's view, Warburton fulfills Cornford's "ritual role of the cook-doctor" who assists in the painful "conversion of the old into the new," since he

> spends the entire interview trying to impress Harry with the seriousness of Amy's illness and imminent death, symbolically expressing the ritual fate of the impure old god. But Harry, by insisting on ignoring Warburton's mission in his own search to find out the truth about his past, assists the cook-doctor's purposes by moving one step closer to his victory over the old god. While Warburton tries to tell Harry about his mother's illness, Harry is concerned only to find out about his father.[23]

Smith overlooks the bristling antagonism of this scene: Warburton is not a "spiritual assistant" but rather an opponent. Harry does not "assist" the doctor's "purposes," since Warburton in no way wants to see Harry attain "victory" over Amy. Rather, they repeatedly conflict because Warburton's "purpose" is to defend Amy and urge Harry to bend to his mother's wishes, "To make her happy for the time she has to live" (*FR*, p. 261).

As a servant of the mother's will, in opposition to the son, Warburton is analogous to Aegisthus, Clytemnestra's lover. While there is no explicit evidence that Warburton was Amy's lover, Eliot repeatedly stresses his long intimacy as "an old friend of the family." Amy seems to mark him as her own when she insists on telephoning him: "If anyone speaks to Dr. Warburton / It should be myself. . . . I will ring up the doctor myself" (*FR*, pp. 237–38). She chides Harry for not immediately noticing him when they enter the room, attempting to promote an almost paternal-filial relationship between them: "Harry! / Haven't you seen Dr. Warburton? / You know he's the oldest friend of the family, / And he's known you longer than anybody, Harry" (*FR*, p. 255). She then asks the doctor to escort her to dinner:

> AMY
> Will you take me in, Doctor?
> I think we are very much the oldest present—
> In fact we are the oldest inhabitants,
> As we came first, we shall go first, in to dinner.
>
> WARBURTON
> With pleasure, Lady Monchensey,

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And I hope that next year will bring me the same honour.
(*FR*, p. 256)

To Smith, this passage, with its emphasis on age, signifies "the ritual procession and feast in celebration of the renewal and conversion of the old into the new" as the cook-doctor leads the old god to its "sacrificial boiling or stewing" (although at the same time Smith parallels the "curative action" of boiling with Harry's "hot bath").[24] Rather than leading the "old god" to its death, however, Warburton clearly expresses the "hope" that Amy will go on living, so that they can celebrate together in future years. Their elaborate courtesy here suggests a familiar flirtation that has endured from their youth in the age of Victorian gentility. Warburton's love for Amy, while hardly the incestuous sexual passion between Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, still glimmers in his longing comment, "It's only when I get an invitation to dinner / That I ever see your mother" (*FR*, p. 256).

When Amy hears that her second son, John, has been in a car accident and wants to rush to his side, Warburton's reaction again reflects his "many years" as Amy's most "trusted" friend and perhaps a replacement for her absent husband:

AMY
I must see for myself. Order the car at once.

. . . . . .

WARBURTON
I repeat, Lady Monchensey, that you must not go out.
If you do, I must decline to continue to treat you.
You are only delaying me. I shall return at once.

AMY
Well, I suppose you are right. But can I trust you?

WARBURTON
You have trusted me a good many years, Lady Monchensey;
This is not the time to begin to doubt me. . . .
(*FR*, p. 265)

Similarly, Aegisthus is Clytemnestra's most trusted ally in her husband's absence: "my good friend, now as always, who shall be for us / the shield of our defiance" (*O*, p. 82). While Aegisthus is "no weak thing" in Clytemnestra's eyes, Orestes sees him as dominated by his mother, a coward since he let a woman do his killing for him. The angry son expresses nothing but contempt for "this brace of women; since his heart / is female" (*O*, p. 104). Harry is similarly contemptuous of Warburton, whose "heart" is also dominated by his concern for

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"female" interests, as he tries to impress Harry with the urgency of his mother's ill health and imminent death:

> WARBURTON
> I wanted a private conversation with you
> On a confidential matter.
>
> HARRY
> I can imagine—
> Though I think it is probably going to be useless. . . .
>
> WARBURTON
> It is . . . difficult not to be prepared
> For something that is very likely to happen.
>
> HARRY
> O God, man, the things that are going to happen
> Have already happened.
>
> WARBURTON
> It's about your mother . . .
>
> HARRY
> What about my mother?
> Everything has always been referred back to my mother. . . .
> (*FR*, p. 258)

Harry's responses show his irritation with Warburton. He knows the doctor wants to talk about Amy, refuses to listen, and instead asserts himself: "You must let me explain, and then you can talk" (*FR*, p. 259). Indeed, their dialogue, as each insists on talking and refuses to listen, mimics the thrust and parry of a sword fight. Far from "assisting" the "cook-doctor's purposes," Harry is, in fact, defying the doctor. He will not be forced into compliance with his mother's needs; rather he will impose his own need to represent his father's cause on his mother's spokesman, just as Orestes avenges his father first by killing Aegisthus. To each effort Warburton makes to bend Harry to his mother's "happiness," he parries by asserting the memory of his father: "But if you want to talk, at least you can tell me / Something useful. Do you remember my father?" Discouragingly, his adversary responds: "I really don't see / What that has to do with the present occasion / Or with what I have to tell you." Again Harry returns his thrust, repelling news of his mother as "either something that I know already / Or unimportant, or else untrue. But I want to know more about my father."

Like Orestes, an "orphaned child of the eagle-father," Harry

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describes the pathos of "children whose father is lost" through the machinations of their mother and her "whispering" sisters:

> HARRY
> I hardly remember him, and I know very well
> That I was kept apart from him, till he went away.
> We never heard him mentioned, but in some way or another
> We felt that he was always here.
> But when we would have grasped for him, there was only a vacuum
> Surrounded by whispering aunts: Ivy and Violet—
> Agatha never came then. Where was my father?
> (*FR*, p. 260)

His plea, "Where was my father?" echoes Orestes' helpless yearning to reach his father beyond the grave:

> ORESTES
> Father, o my dread father, what thing
> can I say, can I accomplish
> from this far place where I stand, to mark
> and reach you there in your chamber
> with light that will match your dark?
> (*O*, p. 104)

Somehow, if Harry can evoke even a single memory of his father from the clearly reluctant Warburton, he will discover the past his mother deprived him of; he will be one step closer to victory over the familial "ghosts" that have haunted his life. Again Warburton tries to discourage him: "Harry, there's no good probing for misery," but finally admits that Harry's parents "separated by mutual consent / And he went to live abroad. . . . You would not remember." Harry responds in triumph: "But now I do remember" (*FR*, p. 260). In spite of Warburton's resistance, Harry has extracted enough information about his father to spur an important memory. By systematically refusing to acknowledge his mother and forcing Warburton instead to answer his need for memories of his father, Harry has defeated his mother's lackey as effectively as Orestes' sword cut down Aegisthus.

His memory stimulated by Warburton's clue, Harry now recalls the day his father died, "the silence and the hushed excitement / And the low conversation of triumphant aunts." The aunts are merely his mother's pawns, bringing "death into the heart of a child," but Harry is always careful to except one aunt from league with his mother—"Agatha never came then." For Agatha loved his father, and his newly won memory gives Harry the strength to continue reaching for his

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father through her: "If you won't tell me, / I must ask Agatha. I never dared before" (*FR*, p. 261).

Harry's victory over his mother through identification with his father is finalized when Amy notices, "You looked like your father / When you said that," and Harry responds, "I think, mother, / I shall make you lie down. You must be very tired." Harry leavens triumph with sympathy now that his mother's threat is gone, and her defeat is filled with the pathos of aging:

> HARRY
> Mother is asleep, I think: it's strange how the old
> Can drop off to sleep in the middle of calamity
> Like children, or like hardened campaigners. She looked
> Very much as she must have looked when she was a child.
> (*FR*, p. 267)

Amy, like Clytemnestra, was indeed a "hardened campaigner," but the war is over; parent and child have exchanged roles.

Harry has broken the bonds of the physical mother, but he has yet to complete "expiation" and "expurgation." As Agatha says, "knowledge . . . must precede the expiation," and her role is to complete Harry's self-knowledge. The final step in Harry's "liberation from the human wheel" occurs under the guidance of Agatha, his spiritual mother, just as Apollo sends Orestes to Athena's "citadel" for "words . . . that will have magic in their figures" to resolve his "afflictions once for all" (*O*, p. 137). Maud Bodkin and Grover Smith have suggested that Agatha may be equated with Athena, but both find that she falls short of Aeschylus' "divine figure reconciling the old to the new order," and that her transformation of the Erinyes in Eliot's version lacks "dramatic justification."[25] They did not explore the parallels between these two figures in any detail, however, which should be done before a definitive conclusion is reached.

Harry comes to Agatha as the final step in his pilgrimage:

> HARRY
> What I want to know is something I need to know,
> And only you can tell me. I know that much.
> . . . . . .
> I have thought of you as the completely strong,
> The liberated from the human wheel.
> So I looked to you for strength.
> (*FR*, p. 273)

So, too, Orestes arrives, "a clean and innocent supplicant" (*O*, p. 151), looking to Athena for strength:

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ORESTES
I call upon Athene, queen of this land, to come
and rescue me. She, without work of her spear, shall win
myself and all my land and all the Argive host
to stand her staunch companion for the rest of time.
Whether now ranging somewhere in the Libyan land
beside her father's crossing . . . or [on] enshrouded foot
rescuing there her friends, or on the Phlegraean flat
like some bold man of armies sweeps with his eyes the scene,
let her come! She is a god and hears me far away.
So may she set me free from what is at my back.
(*O*, p. 145)

This speech provides a vivid picture of Athena and her role in the pantheon. She is clearly identified with men, as Orestes describes her "beside her father's crossing" and as a warrior "like some bold man of armies," but it is significant that she will "rescue" him "without work of her spear." Athena represents the will of the father, but tempered by mercy. If violence could have resolved the situation, Orestes would have no need of Athena, since he already has the aid of Apollo, whose hatred of the Erinyes is virulent. They are in Apollo's eyes,

APOLLO
lewd creatures,
repulsive maidens . . . with whom no moral man,
no god, nor even any beast, will have to do.
It was because of evil they were born, because
they hold the evil darkness of the Pit below
Earth, loathed alike by men and by the heavenly gods.
(*O*, p. 137)

Apollo considers the Erinyes "evil" because they represent the physicality of the "Earth" mother, the "evil darkness of the Pit below," which calls men to a physical death unalleviated by a "heavenly" eternity. Apollo urged Orestes to matricide, declaring, "it was I who made you strike your mother down." But, however violent Apollo's hatred may be of matriarchal rituals "where mutilation lives," matriarchal blood-law where "by judgment given, heads are lopped and eyes gouged out," and matriarchal sexuality where "by the spoil of sex the glory of young boys is defeated" (*O*, p. 141), it is not sufficient to protect Orestes, nor to defy the Erinyes' "age-old distributions of power." They cry in answer: "Shame, son of Zeus! Robber is all you are. / A young god, you have ridden down powers gray with age" (*O*, p. 140). Violence is not the answer: matriarchal principles cannot be

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eradicated for they have a powerful claim in human existence; they must be reconciled, and relegated to their proper domain. Only Athena can moderate between Apollo and the Erinyes for she is at once woman, and "all for the father."

Like Persephone, Athena is a Kore, but as Harrison disgustedly notes, she is a "sexless thing," the Kore re-created by "the rising democracy" of Athens, and entirely stripped of any connection to earth, to the mother, to physicality: "Nowhere is this artificiality, this unreality of Athene . . . so keenly felt as in the famous myth of her birth from the brain of Zeus . . . a desperate theological expedient to rid an earth-born Kore of her matriarchal conditions."[26] Athena clearly renounces her tie to the mother in the *Eumenides*:

> ATHENA
> This is a ballot for Orestes I shall cast.
> There is no mother anywhere who gave me birth,
> and, but for marriage, I am always for the male
> with all my heart, and strongly on my father's side.
> (*O*, p. 161)

Born from the brain of the father, Athena personifies reason, that singularly patriarchal virtue. She hears all sides and establishes the Areopagus, trial by jury, liberating civilization from the barbarity of matriarchal blood-law, justice through revenge. Her second act is also "for the male." She casts the deciding ballot for Orestes, and in freeing the matricide, decrees with Apollo that ties of blood no longer reign supreme over ties of law: "So, in a case where the wife has killed her husband, lord / of the house, her death shall not mean most to me." The Erinyes cry out at this betrayal, "Darkness of night, our mother, are you here to watch?" (*O*, p. 161).

Athena may supersede the ancient forces of night, but unlike Apollo she acknowledges that the Erinyes "too, have their work. We cannot brush them aside," or else "the venom of their resolution will return / to infect the soil, and sicken all my land to death" (*O*, p. 152). So Athena turns death to life, converting the Erinyes, "Angry Ones," to Eumenides, "Kindly Ones," by promising them "a place of your own, deep hidden under ground that is yours by right," where they will "win first fruits / offerings for children and the marriage rite for always," ensuring continuity of the "human seed." Now, however, the earth mother's representatives have been restored as *part of* the Olympian patriarchy, forsaking retribution for beneficence in a reaffirmation of "the luminous evidence of Zeus" (*O*, pp. 163–67).

Like Orestes, Harry clings to the mercy of a goddess "always for the

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male / with all my heart," for Agatha is parallel to Athena, firstly, in her contempt for women and her dissociation from them. She considers her "thirty years" of teaching women at Oxford nothing more than "solitude": "Alone, among women, in a women's college, / Trying not to dislike women" (*FR*, p. 282). Mary, who studied under Agatha, suffered as much from her domination as from Amy's: "I know I wasn't one of your favorite students: / I only saw you as the principal / Who knew the way of dominating timid girls" (*FR*, p. 245).

Agatha is certainly, like Athena, "all for the father." She loved Harry's father and she is Harry's ally now in the "war of phantoms," giving him the final understanding of his father that liberates him—just as she liberated his father—from Amy, and just as Athena's vote for Orestes frees him from the Erinyes. Agatha was invited to Wishwood long ago to alleviate Amy's "loneliness" in her cold, "childless" marriage, yet characteristically she united with the man, instead of her sister:

AGATHA
I came
Once for a long vacation. I remember
A summer day of unusual heat
For this cold country.

HARRY
And then?

AGATHA
There are hours when there seems to be no past or future,
Only a present moment of pointed light
When you want to burn. When you stretch out your hand
To the flames.

(*FR*, p. 274)

Agatha describes her love for Harry's father in images of heat and light, to signify that such asexual love partakes of eternity, "when there seems to be no past or future," and divinity, in its "pointed light." That their love was a purely spiritual "flame" is apparent since Amy became pregnant, not Agatha: Amy bore the physical seed, Agatha the spiritual soul. Her role as Athenian Kore—the maiden who spurns physical motherhood, as opposed to Persephonean Kore, the maiden who becomes mother—is preserved, as she says to Harry: "I felt that you were in some way mine! / And that in any case I should have no other child" (*FR*, p. 275). So, it is fitting that Harry's spiritual rebirth should take place through communion with Agatha, as she reveals the long-hidden secret that his father, although "not suited to the role of murderer," had plotted in desperation "how to get rid of your mother."

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HARRY
In what way did he wish to murder her?

AGATHA
Oh, a dozen foolish ways, each one abandoned
For something more ingenious. You were due in three months time;
You would not have been born in that event: I stopped him. . . .
I did not want to kill *you*!
You to be killed! What were you then? only a thing called "life"—
(*FR*, p. 274)

Agatha is exactly analogous to Athena: she "casts her ballot" for Harry by preserving his life; she averts violence and prevails through mercy; she is "all for the father," yet she knows that "only a thing called 'life'"—physical life, the realm of the Erinyes—must also be honored. Harry responds to her cry, "But I wanted you!" by acknowledging union, "And have me"; thus, he finds rebirth through her love. Agatha has provided the last piece to the puzzle of his father, allowing Harry to see that he has "been wounded in a war of phantoms" that "have no more power than I," and absolving him of guilt for his fantasized murder of a wife/mother figure, just as Orestes is absolved of matricide (*FR*, p. 276). Agatha's revelation has taught him, just as Athena teaches, that "Everything tends towards reconciliation." Murder is not the answer: the Erinyes cannot be eradicated, for physical ties have a powerful claim in human existence; rather, they must be transformed through acceptance. Harry must accept his humanity before he can find spiritual freedom. He must accept that he is "still befouled, / But I know there is only one one way out of defilement—/ which leads in the end to reconciliation" (*FR*, p. 279).

Only Agatha was capable of leading Harry to "reconciliation," just as only Athena could liberate Orestes from the Erinyes, through conciliation, mercy, and persuasion. Thus, Eliot's Agatha does transform the Erinyes into Eumenides, I believe, convincingly. When they appear for the final time, Harry is no longer "afraid" and understands their significance as instruments of divine grace, like Aeschylus' Eumenides, which become "luminous evidence of Zeus." He is "ready to leave Wishwood," ready to follow them to the sunlight—"the judicial sun / Of the final eye"—that is symbolic of patriarchal divinity.

[1] Ivor Brown, "Review," *Observer*, 26 March 1939. Reprinted in *T. S. Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Michael Grant (London: Routledge, 1976), II, 376.

[2] Desmond MacCarthy, "Some Notes on Mr. Eliot's New Play," *New Statesman*, 17 (25 March 1939). Reprinted in Grant, *T. S. Eliot*, II, 374.

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[3] Maud Bodkin, "The Eumenides and Present-Day Consciousness," *Adelphi*, 15 (May 1939), 411–13. Reprinted in Grant, *T. S. Eliot*, II, 386.

[4] Maud Bodkin, *The Quest for Salvation in an Ancient and a Modern Play* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), pp. 3–4 and 39.

[5] F. O. Matthiessen, *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947), p. 173.

[6] Grover Smith, *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1956), pp. 201–10.

[7] David E. Jones, *The Plays of T. S. Eliot* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1960), pp. 90–91.

[8] Carol H. Smith, *T. S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 129 –34.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 134–37.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 123.

[11] Bodkin, *The Quest for Salvation*, p. 33.

[12] Richmond Lattimore, trans., *Aeschylus I: Oresteia*, incl. *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers* (*Choephoroi*), and *The Eumenides* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 142; all references are given parenthetically in the text, cited as *O*.

[13] T. S. Eliot, "The Family Reunion," *The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York: Harcourt, 1971), p. 227; all references are given parenthetically in the text, cited as *FR*.

[14] Eliot revealed his knowledge of Jane Harrison's work often in his reviews of the Twenties. See for instance, "The Beating of a Drum," *Nation and Athenaeum*, 6 Oct. 1923, pp. 11–12; "Euripides and Gilbert Murray," *Art and Letters*, 3 (Spring 1920), 38–43; "A Prediction in Regard to Three English Authors," *Vanity Fair*, 21 (6 Feb. 1924), 29; "War-Paint and Feathers," *Athenaeum*, 17 Oct. 1919, p. 1036.

[15] Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Eng.: At the University Press, 1903), p. 201.

[16] A. W. Verrall, *The "Choephori" of Aeschylus* (London: Macmillan, 1893), introd., p. xxi.

[17] C. A. P. Ruck, "Documentation," *The Wasson Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries*, R. Gordon Wasson et al. (New York: Harcourt, 1978), p. 85.

[18] Indeed, Mary seems to be a more fully developed Marie, as her name suggests. Both are associated with early spring flowers. Philip Sicker has pointed out that Marie "unquestionably anticipates" the hyacinth girl, "who stands sexually willing and eager with her hair wet and her arms full of flowers." Paralyzed by a sense of "death-in-life," the male persona of *The Waste Land*, in Sicker's opinion, does not consummate the fertile sexual renewal Marie offers, so she "becomes that faint memory of lost sexual health" and is nostalgically envisioned in a "hauntingly beautiful recollection of the 'heart of light.'" See "The Belladonna: Eliot's Female Archetype in *The Waste Land*," *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 30 (1984), 420–31. Harry rejects Mary for the same reason and also envisions her as an inaccessible light: "sunlight" "at the end of the corridor." If Mary's name evokes the Madonna, it must do so ironically, since her significance for Eliot, like Marie's, lies in her potential fecundity, not her virginity.

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[19] Harrison, *Prolegomena*, pp. 49–53.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 61.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 53.
[22] W. B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 185.
[23] Carol H. Smith, *T. S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory*, pp. 139–43.
[24] *Ibid.*
[25] Bodkin, *The Quest for Salvation*, p. 35; Grover Smith, *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays*, pp. 207–09.
[26] Harrison, *Prolegomena*, p. 303.

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"The Noisiest Novel Ever Written": The Soundscape of Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*

Stephen J. Adams

"The squalor and filth, the hopelessness and helplessness of slum life are remorselessly presented and the cacophony never ceases—this must be the *noisiest* novel ever written."[1] Walter Allen's remark identifies one of the most striking and unusual features of Henry Roth's novel: this text opens up a world of sound as few others seem to do. Although most fictional imagery is, like our language itself, overwhelmingly visual, *Call It Sleep* offers many lessons in the verbal evocation of "soundscape"—a term coined by the composer R. Murray Schafer in his highly original study of the sonic environment *The Tuning of the World*. Schafer advances many new terms and concepts which, by overturning the visual bias of our language and culture, create a vocabulary that helps to explain the operations of sound in the world of young David Schearl, Roth's central character. Roth's uncanny evocation of David's sonic environment does much to account for the emotional intensity felt by most of the novel's readers.

Call It Sleep is, I am convinced, still undervalued. Though the peculiarities of the novel's publication history—its virtual disappearance in the Thirties, its acclaim after the paperback edition of 1964—are well known to Roth's readers, the book since then seems to have become pigeonholed as a "Jewish novel," rather than the essential American novel that I think it is. There may well be, as Leslie Fiedler has said, "no more Jewish book among American novels,"[2] but the impact and significance of this book extend far beyond its Jewish interest, profound as that may be. No other American novel dramatizes so powerfully the

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trauma of the newly arrived immigrant. It is the classic portrayal, writes Richard J. Fein, "of the Americanized son who pits himself against the unyielding immigrant father."[3] In David's psychological adventure, we experience from the inside a paradigmatic rejection of Old World values and a tentative reaching toward the new. And the novel treats this distinctively American theme with unparalleled richness of implication and technical mastery. Far from being a novel of a particular ethnic group, *Call It Sleep* claims a central place in the canon of American fiction.

Critics of *Call It Sleep* have tended to focus on David's psychology—his oedipal attachment to his mother, Genya, and his fear of his father, Albert. Or they have focused on the novel's spiritual implications, treating it, like Fiedler, as "astonishingly a religious book."[4] On the other hand—still perhaps influenced by the Thirties' controversy in the Marxist *New Masses* over its supposed failure as "proletarian fiction"—they have downplayed the novel's broader social significance. Yet from the immigrant-crowded steamer Peter Stuyvesant sailing past the Statue of Liberty in the prologue, to David's climactic acts of betrayal and atonement, Roth's novel lives through the painful processes of separation and assimilation. Psychologically, David must separate himself from his father's rejection and his mother's emotional hold. Spiritually, he attempts to reach beyond a confining and yet somewhat destabilized Judaism, moving from an Old Testament culture into one defined and controlled by the New.[5] The gradual orientation of a fearful child, and his painful discovery of power, of relative maturity, of freedom from fear—of all the freedoms held out by America—form the core of the novel's experience.

The intensity of this experience derives from Roth's creation of the young boy's point of view, which critics have universally praised. More specifically, it derives, I believe, from Roth's ability to create the sensory world of the child, particularly the sense of sound. Though the text has not entirely traded eyes for ears, it has at least altered the usual ratio. The world of sound, as Schafer insists (taking his cue from Marshall McLuhan), is "loaded with direct personal significance for the hearer."[6] While sight defines objects as separate and distanced from the perceiver, sound seems to enter inside the body. Vision separates objects as distinct things, but the heard object is often unseen and unidentified. For this reason, sound is naturally linked to the disembodied or the supernatural; as Schafer puts it, "God originally came to man through the ear, not the eye."[7] Don Ihde, in *Listening and Voice*, agrees:

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> It is the *invisible* which poses a series of almost unsurmountable problems for much contemporary philosophy. "Other minds" or persons who fail to disclose themselves in their "inner" invisibility; the "Gods" who remain hidden; my own "self" which constantly eludes a simple visual appearance; the whole realm of spoken and heard language must remain unsolvable so long as our seeing is not also a listening. *It is to the invisible that listening may attend.* . . . The primary presence of the God of the West has been the God of Word, YHWH.[8]

But if sound can acquire a numinous cast, it is also inseparable from the instincts of alarm. As Schafer observes:

> The sense of hearing cannot be closed off at will. There are no earlids. When we go to sleep, our perception of sound is the last door to close and it is also the first to open when we awaken. These facts have prompted McLuhan to write: "Terror is the normal state of any oral society for in it everything affects everything all the time."[9]

If *Call It Sleep* is, as Walter Allen declares, "the most powerful evocation of the terrors of childhood ever written,"[10] the reason may be David's heightened sensitivity to sound. And after David's final vision in which his unconscious mind constructs a "self" which survives his father's wrath, deliverance from terror of the loud world forms part of the meaning of the ambivalent sleep at the end of the novel.

Roth's text evokes David's soundscape on three levels of awareness. Often it records sound simply as part of the child's general perception. On a second level, David not only registers sounds but reacts to them—often with alarm, but with a range of other emotions as well. On a third level, however, he not only hears and reacts but he interprets as well. David is not the simple passive character that some critics, and even Roth himself, seem to think.[11] As Naomi Diamant has shown, in some of the best criticism written about the novel, *Call It Sleep* is "a semiotic *Bildungsroman*" in which David learns not only to *de*code but to *en*code his environment.[12] (Diamant wisely qualifies this phrase, since the novel covers only three years of David's life and is not technically a *Bildungsroman*, but it raises many issues common to the genre.) I would add furthermore that this process, which Roth quite consciously modeled on Joyce,[13] occurs simultaneously in the character and in the reader; as motifs accumulate, we together with David gradually invest them with symbolic and emotional attributes. The reader's experience fuses with that of the young boy, as he learns not simply to react to his New World but to interpret it and live in it.

On the level of simple perception, David is a remarkably sensitive

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register of his sonic environment, or to use Schafer's word, he is a reliable "earwitness." After the dry, objective narration of the Prologue, which tonally as well as semantically establishes the family's sense of emotional exile as they enter New York harbor in 1907, the text plunges into David's phenomenal world, creating auditory as well as visual perspective:

> Where did the water come from that lurked so secretly in the curve of the brass? Where did it go, gurgling in the drain? What a strange world must be hidden behind the walls of a house! But he was thirsty. "Mama!" he called, his voice rising above the hiss of sweeping in the frontroom. "Mama, I want a drink." The unseen broom stopped to listen. "I'll be there in a moment," his mother answered. A chair squealed on its castors; a window chuckled down; his mother's approaching tread. (p. 17)

Roth often makes us hear by finding the unexpected phrase: the "slight, spattering sound from the end of her lip," as Genya drinks tea (p. 121); a "hiss of shoes" on stone outside the door (p. 355); a door "tittering to and fro in the wind" (p. 418).

And of course, as Bonnie Lyons and others have noted, the text makes us aware of the sounds of languages—Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish, and all the broken English dialects of the street. Roth expertly distinguishes, for example, the Irish brogue of the policemen from the speech of an Italian peanut vendor (p. 148), and with virtuoso flair even endows one of his speakers with both dialect and an almost impenetrable lisp: "Cauthye I wanthyloo, dayuth w'y' " (p. 360). Roth ensures that his text must be read with ears as well as eyes. Such passages may be said to dramatize David's awareness of the difficulty of extracting meaning from an alien language. As Raymond Chapman has noted,

> the primacy of speech over writing can be asserted even through the written text, with humor or with some social purpose. Indeed, the writer may actually draw attention to the difficulty and artificiality of what he is doing. He may emphasize the fact that the nature of language in its two realizations gives him an impossible task.[14]

In "The Cellar," David registers primarily the domestic environment of the apartment in Brownsville: As his mother touches the lock on the door, "the hidden tongue sprang in the groove" (p. 46); she sets the table, "knives ringing faintly, forks, spoons, side by side" (p. 69); she talks to her husband, "noisily setting the dishes down in the sink" (p. 77). David at this point is indoors mostly, and on his major venture outdoors, following the telegraph poles, he gets lost. His sleep is

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disturbed one time by "the frosty ring of a shovel scraping the stony sidewalk" (p. 56); but his awareness of the outdoor soundscape in this setting is dominated by children's play: "So get back in de line. Foller de leader. Boom! Boom! Boom!" (p. 87).

In "The Picture," however, when the Schearls move to the lower East Side, the outdoor soundscape is more insistent:

> Here in 9th Street it wasn't the sun that swamped one as one left the doorway, it was sound—an avalanche of sound. There were countless children, there were countless baby carriages, there were countless mothers. And to the screams, rebukes, and bickerings of these, a seemingly endless file of hucksters joined their bawling cries. On Avenue D horse-cars clattered and banged. Avenue D was thronged with beer wagons, garbage carts, and coal trucks. There were many automobiles, some blunt and rangey, some with high straw poops, honking. Beyond Avenue D, at the end of a stunted, ruined block that began with shacks and smithies and seltzer bottling works and ended in a junk heap, was the East River on which many boat horns sounded. On 10th Street, the 8th Street Crosstown car ground its way toward the switch. (p. 143)

The noises of general humanity invade the indoors as well: "The stairs were of stone and one could hear himself climb. The toilets were in the hall. Sometimes the people in them rattled newspapers, sometimes they hummed, sometimes they groaned. That was cheering" (pp. 143–44). In one scene after another, David's ears register the sound of human crowds:

> Curtains overhead paddled out of open windows. The air had shivered into a thousand shrill, splintered cries, wedged here and there by the sudden whoop of a boy or the impatient squawk of a mother. . . . In the shelter of a doorway, across the gutter, a cluster of children shouted in monotone up at the sky:
>
> "Rain, rain, go away, come again some oddeh day. Rain, rain. . . ."
>
> The yard was gloomy. Wash-poles creaked and swayed, pulleys jangled. In a window overhead, a bulky, bare-armed woman shrilled curses at someone behind her and hastily hauled in the bedding that straddled the sills like bulging sacks.
>
> "And your guts be plucked!" her words rang out over the yard. "Couldn't you tell me it was raining?" (pp. 223–24)

Even when David, near the beginning of "The Rail," retreats to the freedom of the rooftop—"that silent balcony on the pinnacle of turmoil"—he remains eerily aware of the humanity below: "What sounds

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from the street, what voices drifted up the air-shafts, only made his solitude more real" (p. 299). Human crowds provide what Schafer calls the "keynote" sound of the novel, the sound that acts as a constant point of reference like tonality in a piece of music; or to borrow Schafer's figure-ground analogy from visual perception, they provide the ground against which more meaning-laden figures are heard. This crescendo of voices accompanies David through the latter half of the novel to his climactic action at the trolley rail. It amply prepares for the daring divided narration of Chapter 21, in which David's self-enclosed consciousness is surrounded by this keynote chorus of human voices, even though he no longer hears them.[15]

Reading *Call It Sleep* with Schafer's account of past and present soundscapes in mind, one is struck by the predominance of human over mechanical sounds in Roth's city. If this is in fact the noisiest novel ever written, the reason is the narrating character's sensitivity and the author's vivid aural memory; for the soundscape in the New York of 1907 was hardly as noisy as the modern city's, where the keynote, as Schafer observes, is that of the internal-combustion engine.[16] Despite Roth's occasional mention of automobiles, they play little role in the novel; and despite his references to horse-cars, smithies, boat horns, and trolleys—all of which assume important symbolic functions—the human presence dominates; there is a feeling of perspective, of sounds near and far, which is largely obliterated in today's city. Absent from this intensely urban novel too are most natural sounds, apart from the domesticated horses, chickens, parrots, and canaries. And absent, of course, from Roth's indoor settings are modern intrusions like telephone or radio—or any electronic or amplified sound (though curiously enough, Roth's text registers the whine of power lines [p. 425], the so-called "corona noise" that power companies have just recently begun to study).

In fact, for such a noisy book, there is notably little music of any kind. The music is not set apart as an aesthetic object, but is integrated into the lives of the characters, like the children's game song that arouses David's dim memories of Europe (p. 23), or the work song that Genya absently sings as she washes windows (p. 329). Mention is made of a gramophone (Genya had heard one in Europe): "I never heard anything labor so or squawk," she says. "But the peasants were awed. They swore there was devil in the box" (p. 33). The Schearls possess one, but it remains an empty possession, "mute and motionless as the day before creation" (p. 156), as Aunt Bertha chides—though she desires to possess one herself (p. 185).

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But Roth does not treat sonic imagery simply as part of the neutral background of the novelistic world. One cannot consider sound in *Call It Sleep* without quickly becoming entangled in David's emotional responses to it; nor can one consider sound apart from silence. David reacts to both sound and silence at first mainly with aversion, with fear. But gradually in the course of the novel he learns to overcome his fears, to find his place in the apparently hostile environment of the New World. Ultimately, he challenges the noise of power, and he acquiesces in the silence of sleep.

In the important passage near the beginning that establishes David's fear of sudden extinction, symbolized by the dark cellar, critics have noticed Roth's use of darkness and light, but they have failed to comment on his use of sound and silence:

> David never found himself alone on these stairs, but he wished there were not carpet covering them. How could you hear the sound of your own feet in the dark if a carpet muffled every step you took? And if you couldn't hear the sound of your own feet and couldn't see anything either, how could you be sure you were actually there and not dreaming? A few steps from the bottom landing, he paused and stared rigidly at the cellar door. It bulged with darkness. Would it hold? . . . It held! He jumped from the last steps and raced through the narrow hallway to the light of the street. (p. 20)

The incident vividly dramatizes what R. D. Laing would call David's ontological insecurity—his failure to feel secure of his own presence in the world as a real, whole, and continuous person. Thus a few pages later, when David again ventures the same route, he begs his mother, "Mama, will you leave the door open till—till I'm gone—till you hear me downstairs?" (p. 58).

Being heard is assurance of being. As Schafer remarks, silence, in the Western world at least, has mainly negative connotations: "Man likes to make sounds to remind himself that he is not alone. From this point of view total silence is the negation of human personality. Man fears the absence of sound as he fears the absence of life."[17] This fear is observable in other characters as well. Bill Whitney, the watchman who appears briefly in Chapter 21 of "The Rail," mutters to himself—"and this he did not so much to populate the silence with ephemeral, figment selves, but to follow the links of his own, slow thinking, which when he failed to hear, he lost" (p. 410). And the irrepressible Aunt Bertha, perhaps the only character besides David who fully senses the soundscape around her, embraces the turmoil—"I hate quiet and I hate

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death" (p. 168)—as roundly as she rejects the Old World she has left behind: "But there's life here, isn't there? There's a stir always. Listen! The street! The cars! High laughter! Ha, good! Veljish was still as a fart in company. Who could endure it?" (p. 153).

Many scenes dramatize David's equation of silence with death and sound with life. When he witnesses a passing funeral, he tells himself, frantically:

> Make a noise. Noise. . . . He advanced. What? Noise. Any. "Aaaaah! Ooooh!" he quavered. "My country 'tis of dee!" He began running. The cellar door. Louder. "Sweet land of liberty," he shrilled, and whirled toward the stairs. . . . "Land where our fodders died!" The landing; he dove for the door, flinging himself upon it. . . . (p. 62)

The land where David's forefathers actually died, of course, is not America but the Old World, though his choice of lyrics ironically underlines an oedipal wish for his father's death here. A much later scene again equates silence with nonexistence. David drops a rosary gotten from his Catholic friend Leo on the floor of a different cellar: "At the floor of a vast pit of silence glimmered the rough light, pulsed and glimmered like a coin." He gropes for it: "'I'm gonna get it,' almost audibly. '*I am*!' His teeth gritted, head quivering in such desperate rage, the blood whirred in his ears. . . '*I am*'" (p. 354). But with the whir of his own life processes in his ears, David's desperation is interrupted by the precocious sexual experimentation of Leo and cousin Polly—sounds that signify not the extinction but the creation of life. At yet another point in the book, David thinks of himself in his mother's womb, a memory, possibly even a prenatal memory, triggered when he overhears the mysterious word "Benkart," Polish for *bastard*: "—Benkart! (Beside the doorway David fastened on the word) What? Know it. No, don't. Heard it. In her belly. Listen!" (p. 202).

David learns early that where there is life there is sound: pure silence is unattainable. Hiding himself in the cellar darkness after a fight with playmates, he discovers

> there was no silence here, but if he dared to listen, he could hear tappings and creakings, patterings and whisperings, all furtive, all malign. It was horrible, the dark. The rats lived there, the hordes of nightmare, the wobbly faces, the crawling and misshapen things. (p. 92)

The composer John Cage similarly learned that there is no such thing as pure silence: when he entered an anechoic chamber and reported two sounds, one high and one low, he was told that one was his nervous

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system in operation, the other his blood circulating.[18] David likewise experiences sound as part of his most intimate bodily rhythms; his system vibrates with the world around him. Helping with his father's milk deliveries, he is physically oppressed by the jangling bottles: "Louder, louder, nearer, they seemed to clank in David's heart as well. With every step his father took, the breath in his own body became more labored, more suffocating" (p. 279). Sonic metaphors enter Roth's language: "His blood, which a moment before had been chiming in bright abandon, deepened its stress, weighted its rhythm to an ominous tolling" (p. 339). As David flees the violent family confrontation in "The Rail," "every racked fibre in his body screamed out in exhaustion. Each time his foot fell was like a plunger through his skull" (p. 404).

Call It Sleep depicts many scenes in which David detects others by sound, or lurks out of sight eavesdropping on an adult world otherwise closed to him: "He crept to his doorway, stiff ankle-joints cracking like gun-shots. A blur of voices behind the door. . . . Hope clutched at it" (p. 386). David's instinctive recoil from Luter includes a disjunction of sight from sound: "But chiefly he found himself resenting Mr. Luter's eyes. They seemed to be independent of his speech, far outstripping it in fact; for instead of glancing at one, they fixed one and then held on until the voice caught up" (pp. 30–31). Elsewhere, David notes "a short chuckle that pecked like a tiny hammer" (p. 37), or a frown and "a faint smacking sound from the side of his mouth" (p. 45). Indeed throughout the novel, Roth's dialogue is loaded with stage directions in what may seem an excessive way. Within the space of a page we read: "said Luter sympathetically . . . said Luter meditatively . . . she laughed, straightening up . . . said Luter with a sigh . . . she agreed . . . he said warmly . . . said Luter with conviction . . . his mother laughed condoningly . . . he assured her . . . said Luter with the hesitance of careful appraisal" (pp. 40–41). This is a mannerism to be sure, but it is consistent with David's sensitivities. As he constitutes his world through listening, he is alert not just to what is said, but even more to the intonations and intentions behind what is said.

Roth seems unusually aware of the relationship between sound as phenomenon and sound as sign. This is clear in his treatment of languages—such as the Hebrew instilled phonetically before it is joined to "chumish," or translation. And when Genya and Aunt Bertha converse in Polish to close David out of the conversation, he strains to follow: "But though he pried here, there, everywhere among the gutturals and surds striving with all his power so split the stubborn scales of speech, he could not" (pp. 195–96). But nonverbal signals, too,

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clutter David's world—from the "familiar tinny jangle" of a shopkeeper's bell (p. 78), to the factory whistles (p. 22) and school bells (p. 59) by which he keeps time.

The factory whistle, however, serves not only as a timekeeper but, to borrow another of Schafer's coinages, a "soundmark" as well. Schafer defines a soundmark as "a community sound which is unique or possesses qualities which make it specially regarded or noticed by the people in that community."[19] In other words, the sound is not merely registered but invested with particular meaning or feeling. During the episode in which David, lost, is taken in by sympathetic policemen, Roth makes it plain that he has learned to orient himself, to interpret his environment, not through his eyes but through his ears. When he loses his way, he first tries to find himself visually: "Though he conned every house on either side of the crossing, no single landmark stirred his memory. They were all alike—wooden houses and narrow sidewalks to his right and left" (p. 96). But when at the police station he hears the familiar whistle, he immediately comprehends the distance he has traveled and panics at the thought of his mother: "Whistles? He raised his head. Factory whistles! The others? None! Too far! So far she was. So far away!—But she heard them—she heard the other whistles that he couldn't hear" (p. 104). The policemen notice, but Genya soon arrives and, as the two walk home, the process of sensory orientation is repeated. David is again deceived by his eyes:

> "That way, Mama?" He stared incredulously. "This way!" He pointed to the right. "This way is my school."
>
> "That's why you were lost! It's the other way." (p. 109)

But he knows he has arrived in the right place through the aural and tactile sensations of the wind: "They neared the open lot. He knew where he was now, certain of every step. There was a wind that prowled over that area of rock and dead grass, that would spring up at them when they passed it. And the wind did" (pp. 109–110).

This sonic orientation is repeated in "The Picture," where David again secures his place in the new East Side neighborhood largely through sound:

> He knew his world now. With a kind of meditative assurance, he singled out the elements of the ever-present din—the far voices, the near, the bells of a junk wagon, the sing-song cry of the I-Cash-clothes-man, waving his truncheon-newspaper, the sloshing jangle of the keys on the huge ring on the back of the tinker. (pp. 173–74)

Indeed throughout the novel, from the bellow of the steamer on the

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first page to the climactic moment when David regains consciousness at the end, whistles and boat horns—which "set up strange reverberations in the heart" (p. 63)—gather symbolic associations having to do with orientation in time and place.

In *Call It Sleep*, one can observe this process by which a sound signal becomes a sound symbol, or to repeat Naomi Diamant's terms, by which David learns not only to decode but to encode his environment. As Schafer puts it, "a sound event is symbolic when it stirs in us emotions or thoughts beyond its mechanical sensations or signalling function, when it has a numinosity or reverberation that rings through the deeper recesses of the psyche."[20] Whistles and boat horns are the most obvious examples in the novel, but many other sonic motifs are developed and interrelated in complex ways. Furthermore, although the factory whistles suggest David's increasing security in his surroundings, other symbols take on more mysterious overtones. As Walter Allen remarks, Roth's novel captures "better than it has ever been done in English before what might be called a child's magical thinking, which is clearly allied to the thinking of the poet." [21] Like his literary precursor Huck Finn, who hears "an owl, away off, who-whooing about somebody that was dead, and a whippowill and a dog crying about somebody who was going to die" (Chapter 1), David Schearl hears certain sounds, like the Hebrew words of Isaiah, that trigger feelings of the supernatural.[22]

> All his senses dissolved into the sound. The lines, unknown, dimly surmised, thundered in his heart with limitless meaning, rolled out and flooded the last shores of his being. Unmoored in space, he saw one walking on impalpable pavements that rose with the rising trees. Or were they trees or telegraph-poles, each crossed and leafy, none could say, but forms stood there with footholds in unmitigated light. (pp. 255–56)

Here Isaiah's coal, which purifies his unclean lips and makes him a prophet of God, is associated not only with telegraph poles (and thus with David's earlier venture into the unknown), but also with the cross of the Christian Messiah, the thunder of Yahweh (see below), and the blinding light of unlimited power. It is associations like these, formed in David's mind, that drive him to the apparently irrational but quite explicable act of the penultimate chapter.

Because David, a young boy in a new world, must invent his own symbols, Reb Yiddel Pankower asks himself a key question: "What was going to become of these Yiddish youth? What would become of this new breed? These Americans?" (p. 374). This process of becoming is what *Call It Sleep* reveals. There may be, as Meyer Levin suggests, "no

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more perceptive work in any literature dealing with a child's conditioning."[23] But just as the melodramatic convergences of "The Rail" reveal this positive process of conditioning, of encoding and creating new meanings, so do they join them to a mounting series of betrayals—betrayals of his mother's sexual secret and his father's presumed disgrace, of his sympathetic aunt and her stepdaughter's honor, of his religion and his rabbi. The betrayals are psychological, moral, cultural, and religious.

David's climactic act then, is simultaneously an effort to atone for them and an effort to seize power—literally the electric power of the trolley rail, but symbolically the sexual power of his father and the religious power of his private messianic vision. The scene is a confluence of interrelated symbols in which the psychological battle between father and son stands for conflicts on several other levels: it suggests a battle between Old and New Worlds, between Old and New Testaments, between captivity and freedom. As Roth's punning reference to Ahura Mazda suggests ("Vus dere a hura mezda, Morr's?" [p. 414]), it is a Manichaean battle between symbols of light and darkness.[24] To these conflicts, which a number of Roth's critics have explored, I would add that it is a battle between sound and silence.

As Schafer says, "Noise equals Power."[25] The loudest noises in the soundscape are created by those who hold greatest power over it. Thus the factory whistles, boat horns, and trolley noises dominate a society controlled by industry and commerce. It is a society David wishes to enter. This equation of loudness with power is understood instinctively by David's peers:

> "Yuh don' make enough noise, dat's why. Yuh oughta ha' Wildy."
>
> "Who don' make enough noise? I hollered loud like anyt'ing. Who beats?" (p. 219)

At various points, David's Brownsville playmate Yussie imitates the noise of a gun: "Bing! I'm an Innian" (p. 81); a firecracker that exploded prematurely in a man's hand: "Kling! Kling! Kling! Jos' like dat! Kling! Kling! Kling! Cauze de fiyuh crecker wen' bang by his ears!" (p. 139); and the printing press that injures Albert's thumb: "Id don' go boof?" (p. 141). David, whose sensibilities are clearly more delicate, at first recoils from such noisemaking; but when he discovers a source of mystical power between the trolley rails, he experiences it as an overwhelming fusion of light and sound, as Roth's language resorts to the figure of synesthesia:

> From open fingers, the blade plunged into darkness.

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> Power!
> Like a paw ripping through all the stable fibres of the earth, power, gigantic, fetterless, thudded into day! And light, unleashed, terrific light bellowed out of iron lips. The street quaked and roared, and like a tortured thing, the sheet zinc sword, leapt writhing, fell back, consumed with radiance. (p. 253)

This first electric shock has resulted from anti-Semitic hounding by a group of street bullies; that is, it is tied to David's difficulties in making a place for himself in the Gentile-dominated world that he struggles to understand. But after the event, he discovers that his fear of the darkness has been lifted: "Gee. Used to be darker. . . . Ain't really there. Inside my head. Better inside. Can carry it" (p. 261). And soon after, he discovers the relative freedom of the rooftop, where the sunlight again is felt in terms of synesthesia—"a trumpet, triple-trumpet bearing light" (p. 296)—and where he can actually strike up a friendship, though an unequal one, with a kite-flying Christian. (Leo's kite, of course, recalls that prototypical American Ben Franklin, who tapped the sources of electric power directly from the sky.)

The second and climactic electric shock again reaches for the language of synesthesia, but it takes on more intricate symbolic associations, including a fusion of the sexual and the religious. As if to underscore the religious dimension of Roth's sound symbolism, Schafer advances a concept that he calls "sacred noise." "Wherever Noise has been granted immunity from human intervention," he writes, "there will be found a seat of power":

> The association of Noise and power has never really been broken in the human imagination. It descends from God, to the priest, to the industrialist, and more recently to the broadcaster and the aviator. The important thing to realize is this: to have the Sacred Noise is not merely to make the biggest noise; rather it is a matter of having authority to make it without censure.[26]

When David shoves the metal milk dipper—a symbol associated with both his father's penis and his mother's breast—into the trolley track, his quasi-sexual act ("in the crack be born") seems to him "as though he had struck the enormous bell of the very heart of silence" (p. 411).[27] When the circuit is completed, amid allusions to the virgin birth of Jesus and Peter's betrayal, David experiences the shock as "a blast, a siren of light within him . . . braying his body with pinions of intolerable light," while onlookers witness "a single cymbal-clash of light" and the milk dipper "consumed in roaring incandescence" (p. 419). Significantly, David

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seeks this sacred noise not in the cheder but in the power circuit of the commercial world. His privately coded symbolic act brings him into contact, literally, with the true sources of social power.

Roth's cumulative technique builds complex symbolic chains: David's final self-immolation is anticipated in the doll-burning scene of "The Picture" (p. 207), and the incandescent milk dipper by the ritually burned Passover spoon of "The Coal" (p. 244). Likewise, the whistle that brings David back to consciousness (p. 431) is invested with symbolic and magical properties from many earlier scenes; most prominent is the hallucinatory waterfront scene in which David, transfixed by "fire on the water," is saved from falling by the blast of a tugboat:

> Minutes passed while he stared. The brilliance was hypnotic. He could not take his eyes away. . . . And he heard the rubbing on a wash-board and the splashing suds, smelled again the acrid soap and a voice speaking words that opened like the bands of a burnished silver accordion—Brighter than day. . . . Brighter. . . . Sin melted into light. . . .
>
> Uh chug chug, ug chug!
>
> —Cucka cucka. . . . Is a chicken
>
> Ug chug, ug chug, ug—TEW WEET!
>
> What! He started as if out of a dream. A tremor shook him from head to foot so violently that his ears whirred and rang. His eyes bulged, staring. (pp. 247–48)

David then sees the man on the tugboat who has saved him, "a man in his undershirt, bare, outstretched arms gripping the doorpost on either side. He whistled again, shrill from mobile lips, grinned, spat, and 'Wake up, Kid!' his sudden amused hail rolled over the water, 'fore you throw a belly-w'opper!'" (p. 248).

This complex scene is mentioned by most of Roth's commentators, but again the auditory imagery has been largely ignored. As Lyons observes, the man's "Wake up, Kid!" links David to the sacrificial kid of the Chadgodya, and the man's pose with outstretched arms suggests the Crucifixion (p. 61). But this pose also links him to David's father emerging from his bedroom in the previous chapter: "His stretching arms pressed against both sides of the door-frame till it creaked. 'We need some light'" (p. 242). And the sound of the washboard and splashing suds recalls his mother in the same scene, pronouncing the mystical words "Brighter than day" as she sits in the dark, washing curtains for Passover—surreptitiously breaking the Sabbath after sundown on Friday. The image is thus colored by both oedipal and religious guilt. Furthermore, the "cucka cucka"—a sonic rendition of

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the chugging tugboat—recalls through a sonic pun an earlier visit with Genya to a chicken market:

> It's a sin. . . . So God told him eat in your own markets. . . . That time with mama in the chicken market when we went. Where all the chickens ran around—cuckacucka—when did I say? Cucka. Gee! Funny. Some place I said. And then the man with a knife went zing! Gee! Blood and wings. And threw him down. Even kosher meat when you see, you don't want to eat— (p. 226)

Although the market was kosher, as David recalls while seated in the cheder, Genya's laxity is disturbing: "Mama don't care except when Bertha was looking" (p. 226). The chicken reference furthermore looks forward to the icon David notices in Leo's apartment, Jesus of the Sacred Heart holding his breast open and pointing to his inner organs: "Guts like a chicken, open. And he's holding them" (p. 321). This scene, in which Leo lectures David on the restrictiveness of the Jewish diet and the superiority of "Christchin light"—"Bigger den Jew light" (p. 322)—is the same in which David also gathers information about the mysterious occupation of Genya's Gentile lover, a church organist. Leo describes a church organ: "Dey looks like pianers, on'y dey w'istles" (p. 321).[28] Chickens, organs, whistles, breaking the Mosaic law, taking a Gentile lover, and the superior power of Christian light—all conspire in the subterranean linkages of Roth's text and David's mind (and the reader's) to drive him to question his own origins and to emulate the freedom of the Christian boy whom he first saw flying a kite and "whistling up at the sky" (p. 301): "*Not afraid! Leo wasn't afraid!*" (p. 305).

Furthermore, in David's hallucinating mind at the waterfront, the tugboat whistle and the whistling man aboard her together fuse with a different bird sound:

> E-e-e. Twee-twee-twee. Tweet! Tweet! Cheep! Eet! R-rawk Gee! Whistle. Thought it was that man. In the tugboat. In the shirt. Whistling. Only birds. Canary. That lady's. Polly too—Polly want a cracker—is out already. On the fire-escape. Whistle. (p. 260)

Behind this stands an episode in which David has heard two caged birds in his East Side neighborhood:

> A parrot and a canary. Awk! Awk! the first cried. Eee-tee-tee—tweet! the other. A smooth and a rusty pulley. He wondered if they understood each other. Maybe it was like Yiddish and English, or Yiddish and Polish, the way his mother and aunt sometimes spoke. Secrets. What? (p. 174)

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David clearly associates the bird sounds with the Polish-encoded secrets of his mother, and thus with his own possibly illegitimate origins. The canary, furthermore, looks forward to the escaped canary the boys pursue in Chapter 4 of "The Rail," and thence to the "yellow birds" that symbolize freedom throughout the climactic scene. Though the boys fail to catch the canary in the chapter, they do catch sight of Genya, naked, bathing in the washtub, much to David's anguish. In addition, the parrot bears the name of David's cousin Polly, whom he betrays to Leo's sexual predation in the candy-store cellar, thus repeating the forbidden liaison of Jew and Gentile begun by his mother. Leo, in fact, being Polish, acts as a double for David, suggesting to the reader and perhaps to his own subconscious the boy he might have been if he were truly the son of Genya's lover. Thus the birds and their sounds are circuitously related to David's awareness of his mother's sexuality and his own, to their mutual need for atonement and purification, and at the same time—even at the cost of betraying his Jewishness—to the desirability of the freedoms allowed to Gentiles.

One other significant though less intricate sound symbol reinforces the association of Leo with freedom of mobility and freedom from fear. Again an early memory is involved. In "The Cellar," David, returning home through the snow with a newspaper for his father, began to run: "He had only taken a few strides forward when his foot suddenly landed on something that was not pavement. The sound of hollow iron warned him too late—A coal-chute cover. He slipped" (pp. 78–79). The ruined paper rouses his father's anger, leading soon after to the brutal beating with a coat hanger. The hollow iron sound of the coal-chute ties together his fear of the cellar with his fear of his father, and relates as well to his desire for Isaiah's purifying coal. Near the end of the novel, the same sound alerts David to Leo's approach behind him—on the coveted roller skates: "The sudden whirr of wheels behind him—now louder on the sidewalk now roaring momentarily over the hollow buckle of a coal-chute—" (p. 337). Leo, the liberated and potent Gentile, flies over coal-chutes as he flies over rooftops. This sound is closely allied to the hollow metallic sound of the phallic milk dipper as David pries it loose: "It bulged, sounded hollow. Again he braced himself, thrust—Clank!" (pp. 407–08). And again when he strikes it against the trolley rail: "Only in his ears, the hollow click of iron lingered. Hollow, vain" (p. 414).

Roth weaves together these sound symbols with many other motifs in the climactic scene to suggest David's reaching out for purification and freedom; but he introduces a number of others, as well, linked with

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the negative psychological forces embodied in David's father. Bonnie Lyons traces one of these, the *Zwank* motif, and though she concentrates on its semantic meaning—the Yiddish word for tongs, connecting his mother's sugar tongs with those of Isaiah's angel—she recognizes that when the word first appears in the scene at the rail, "the sound itself seems most important"; the word "assumes its semantic and imagistic significance" only gradually, as David's mind recollects.[29] She does not explain, however, why the word appears not with the angelic tongs but together with David's terrifying vision of his father leaping godlike over the rooftops and swinging his hammer. This recollection goes back to a glimpse inside a blacksmith's shop, just before David burns his Passover spoon and becomes hypnotized by the "fire on the water," where tongs and hammer are combined:

> Acrid odor of seared hooves lingered about the place. Now a horse-shoe glowed under the hammer—ong-jonga-ong-jong-jong-jong—ringing on the anvil as the pincers turned it.
>
> —Zwank. Zwank. In a cellar is—
>
> He passed the seltzer bottlery—the rattle and gurgle—passed the stable. (p. 245)

Thus, like the milk dipper, the tongs are associated not only with the mother and her sugar tongs, but also with the father and his hammer, and also therefore with the fear and guilt that both parents arouse. But this passage also links the hammer and tongs to horses and jangling bottles—sounds later invested with terrifying associations in the milk-delivery episode. These sounds at first seem relatively neutral, even positive, since the event promises an adventure into the outer world as his father's helper; but disaster strikes when David first disobeys instructions to wait with the wagon, and then watches helplessly as two bullies steal milk. His father's rage is soon inscribed into the sounds of the wagon, the bottles, the horses—and above all the whip, with which Albert almost beats to death one of the offenders:

> The crunch of heels on the gravel. Terror! His eyes snapped open.
>
> Dwarfed between the huge gas tanks, his father rounded the path. Eyes downcast as always he hurried, jangling the empty grey bottles in their trays. . . .
>
> "Paid yourself again!" he snarled. "Giddap! Giddap, Billy!" He snatched the whip out of the socket, lashed the horse. Stung, the beast plunged forward. The wheels ground against the curb. "Giddap!" Again the whip. Hooves rang out in a pounding, powerful gallop. The wagon lurched, careened around the

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> corner on creaking axle, empty bottles banging in their boxes. . . . (pp. 279–80)

These sounds, incidentally, are among those identified by Schafer as the most aversive in the pre-automotive urban soundscape[30]; but David's response to the cracking whip needs little explication when he presents it to his father for punishment at the end of the violent quarrel in Chapter 19 of "The Rail." For although David is not physically whipped for the stolen milk, he is verbally disavowed by his raging father—"False son! You, the cause!"—and he is psychologically pressed into silence and nonexistence—"Say anything to your mother . . . and I'll beat you to death! Hear me?" (p. 282). Little wonder, then, that in David's vision the father appears accompanied by jangling milk bottles, a hammer that "snapped like a whip," and the reiterated *Zwank!* as he orders his son to "Go down" (p. 426).

One other archetypal sound attaches to Albert Schearl in this terrible vision: twice we read that his voice "thundered" (pp. 427–28). Lyons quite plausibly identifies this thunder motif with the Germanic hammer-wielding god of wrath, Thor[31]; but oddly enough, she omits reference to the one scene in the novel in which we actually hear "a clap of thunder and a rumbling like a barrel rolling down cellar stairs" (p. 234). It occurs when David, in the cheder, has just successfully recited the Chadgodya. The thunder excites the other children: "Bang! Bang what a bust it gave! I tol' yuh I see a blitz before!" (p. 234). The only characters frightened by the din are David himself and Reb Yiddel Pankower, who ducks his head and exclaims "Shma yisroel. . . . Woe is me!" Both regain composure:

> "Before God," the rabbi interrupted, "none may stand upright."
> —Before God
> "But what did you think?"
> "I thought it was a bed before. Upstairs. But it wasn't." (p. 235)

There is ample precedent in scripture for the rabbi's association of thunder with the wrath of Yahweh. But David's unexpected linking of thunder to the sound of a bed upstairs relates both thunderclap and God's wrath with his oedipal antagonism to his father. The rabbi underlines this association unknowingly, when he derides David's visionary account of Isaiah's coal in the trolley rail: "Oy! Chah! Chah! Chah! I'll split like a herring! Yesterday he heard a bed in the thunder! Today he sees a vision in the crack!" (p. 257). Failing to grasp David's mystical and quasi-sexual symbolic language, the rabbi disqualifies

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himself in David's mind as an authority: "The rabbi didn't know as he knew what the light was." Thus when the milk dipper makes contact with the rail, it appears (amid cries of "Jesus!," "Schloimee, a blitz like—," and "Holy Mother o' God") as a burst of flame that "growled as if the veil of earth were splitting" (p. 420), and the Old Testament thunder is exchanged for that which rends the veil of the temple at Christ's Crucifixion in the Gospel of Matthew.

The father's appearance in David's vision enacts the psychological conflicts that the boy is struggling to resolve, a life-and-death struggle partly figured in symbolic language of sound and silence. Before such a God, none may stand upright—and as the visionary father orders David to "Go down," his consciousness approaches "nothingness," "oblivion," and "silence" (p. 430). But the sounds of life prevail. We hear the "Kh-r-r-r-r-f! S-s-s-s" of David's breath, supplied by artificial respiration, but also, certainly, by his will to survive. And we hear the wires that "whined on their crosses" (p. 425) and the groans of the "man in the wires" whose "purple chicken-guts slipped through his fingers" (p. 426), as David's imagination fuses the two episodes in which he is saved by a whistle into a single image of a messianic Savior.

Although the critics are divided, and Roth himself seems uncertain whether the ending of his novel is positive or negative, my own view is close to those of Naomi Diamant, Maxwell Geismar (in his introduction to the Cooper Square edition of the novel), or William Freedman, who writes:

> The myths of redemption and rebirth are implicit in the story of David Schearl, and both are rendered largely by means of symbolic image pattern that is part of David's own conscious awareness and that is viewed symbolically by his own fertile imagination as well as by the reader.[32]

David, whose name allies him to the messianic family of scriptural tradition, clearly emerges from his ordeal as victor, having undergone an almost literal death and rebirth. Though Leslie Fiedler contends that David's "intended sacrifice redeems no one,"[33] it does, I think, redeem himself, and by extension the population that he stands for—that of the newly assimilated immigrant. The novel portrays in the intensity of David's vision not a passive sensibility but an emerging poetic imagination capable of shaping an imperfect world to its own uses.

As readers of this climactic scene, we witness David's unconscious mind constitute a "self" in terms of a symbolic narrative woven out of its own experience. This narrative functions, in a paradigmatic Freudian

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way, to exorcise the parental demons and reassert the unconscious self on new ground; for as Paul Jay has noted, the whole idea of Freudian analysis "depends on the subject's ability to fashion a narrative, a discursive formulation of the meaning of past events identified in the process of analysis as significant."[34] The outcome of this narrative is, to be sure, provisional, for it almost ends in David's death. But his recovery signifies, in psychological terms, a readiness to assert his independent being in the face of his father's rejection, and in social terms, his ability to assume a place in the loud world. At the novel's end, David Schearl is a successful adult and assimilated American *in posse*. Thus he can finally accept the natural rhythm and natural silence of sleep without fear:

> It was only toward sleep that his ears had power to cull again and reassemble the shrill cry, the hoarse voice, the scream of fear, the bells, the thick-breathing, the roar of crowds and all the sounds that lay fermenting in the vats of silence and the past . . . and feel them all and feel, not pain, not terror, but strangest triumph, strangest acquiescence. One might as well call it sleep. He shut his eyes. (p. 441)

[1] Walter Allen, "Afterword" to Henry Roth, *Call It Sleep* (New York: Avon, 1964), p. 445. Subsequent references to *Call It Sleep* are cited parenthetically in the text.

[2] Leslie Fiedler, "Henry Roth's Neglected Masterpiece," in *Unfinished Business* (New York: Stein and Day, 1972), p. 82. I am also indebted to Naomi Diamant, "Linguistic Universes in Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*," *Contemporary Literature*, 27 (1986), 336–55; James Ferguson, "Symbolic Patterns in *Call It Sleep*," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 14 (1969), 211–20; Ita Scheres, "Exile and Redemption in Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*," *Markham Review*, 6 (1977), 72–77; and Bonnie Lyons, *Henry Roth: The Man and His Work* (New York: Cooper Square, 1976). I must also mention essays by two students, Brian Greenspan and Karim Mamdami.

[3] Richard J. Fein, "Fear, Fatherhood and Desire in *Call It Sleep*," *Yiddish*, 5 (1984), 49.

[4] Fiedler, "Henry Roth's Neglected Masterpiece," p. 85.

[5] Compare Roth's autobiographical reminiscence: "I wanted to adapt to this gentile Irish neighborhood in the shortest time possible; and one of the conditions for adapting was to get away from Judaism" (Lyons, *Henry Roth*, p. 172). Lyons' chapter "*Call It Sleep* as a Jewish Novel" (pp. 125–34) places this issue in context.

[6] R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), p. 11.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 51.

[8] Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: A Phenomenology of Sound* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 14–15.

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[9] Schafer, *The Tuning of the World*, p. 11.

[10] Allen, "Afterword," p. 444.

[11] Roth tells Lyons (*Henry Roth*, p. 160), that David's character is "much too innocent, almost completely victimized, passive." Compare Helge Norman Nilsen, "The Role of the Protagonist in *Call It Sleep*," *Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters*, 13 (1983), 28–41.

[12] Diamant, "Linguistic Universes," pp. 337 and 346. For a semiotic reading that judges David's efforts a failure, see Wayne Lesser, "A Narrative's Revolutionary Edge: The Example of Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*," *Criticism*, 23 (1981), 155–76.

[13] Lyons, *Henry Roth*, pp. 169 and 117–23.

[14] Raymond Chapman, *The Treatment of Sounds in Language and Literature* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 195.

[15] Schafer, *The Tuning of the World*, pp. 9–10. Roth (Lyons, *Henry Roth*, p. 170) fears that while to that point he had written "a fairly cohesive, formally recognizable novel," in this chapter he "ruptures the whole envelope." Richard J. Fein, too, thinks that this scene is "the least convincing part" ("Fear, Fatherhood and Desire in *Call It Sleep*," p. 53).

[16] Schafer, *The Tuning of the World*, p. 82.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 256.

[18] John Cage, *Silence* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1966), p. 13.

[19] Schafer, *The Tuning of the World*, p. 274.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

[21] Allen, "Afterword," p. 446.

[22] Roth identifies *Huckleberry Finn* as "one of my great transitions" (Lyons, *Henry Roth*, p. 168). Don Ihde likewise emphasizes the relationship between religion and sound (*Listening and Voice*, p. 177):

> The very experience of God in the biblical traditions is . . . such that the person of God is "like" an intense auditory experience. . . . In the classical religious experience of Isaiah in the Temple, vision is obscured as the Temple is filled with the smoke of the offering, but the voice of God presents itself in the very midst of the visual obscurity. The God of voice surrounds, penetrates, and fills the worshipper.

[23] Meyer Levin, "A Personal Appreciation," in Henry Roth, *Call It Sleep* (New York: Cooper Square, 1965), p. xlvii.

[24] "Was there a whore master, Morris?" Roth points out the pun to Lyons (*Henry Roth*, p. 171).

[25] Schafer, *The Tuning of the World*, p. 74.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 76.

[27] Both Schafer (*ibid.*, p. 176) and Chapman (*The Treatment of Sounds*, p. 158) discuss the numinous quality of the bell symbol. On the plausibility of David's near-electrocution, see Henry Roth, *Shifting Landscape* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1987), p. 10.

[28] Schafer (*The Tuning of the World*, p. 55) identifies the cathedral organ, the loudest machine produced until that time, as the "sacred noise" of the medieval European.

[29] Lyons, *Henry Roth*, p. 63.

[30] Schafer, *The Tuning of the World*, p. 62.

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[31] Lyons, *Henry Roth*, pp. 56–59.

[32] William Freedman, "Henry Roth and the Redemptive Imagination," in Warren French, ed., *The Thirties* (Deland, Fla.: Everett/Edwards, 1967), p. 114. For Roth's comments on the ending, see Lyons, *Henry Roth*, pp. 170–71.

[33] Fiedler, "Henry Roth's Neglected Manuscript," p. 87.

[34] Paul Jay, *Being in the Text: Self-Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 24–25.

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Tally's *Terra Nova*: From Historical Journals to Existential Journey

Robert J. Andreach

Of plays of recent vintage that have a philosophical bent, as opposed to lighthearted summer-stock fare, one in particular has engendered no scholarly inquiry, no critical commentary. Though well received by theater reviewers and audiences, because it is performed regularly in regional theaters, it seems to be taken at face value: a dramatization of the ill-fated 1910–13 British Antarctic Expedition. Indeed, a production playbill typically cites the play's debt to the journals Captain Robert Falson Scott kept on the expedition and may even include a map contrasting the routes taken by the Englishman and the Norwegian Amundsen in their race to the South Pole in 1911–12. In other words, no inquiry or commentary is needed.

The play is Ted Tally's *Terra Nova*, but although it incorporates passages from Scott's Antarctic journals and actual slides from the expedition, and the title is the name of the ship on which the British Antarctic Expedition sailed from England in June 1910, it is demonstrably more than a docudrama. The rudimentary critical exercise of comparing *Terra Nova* with the relevant sections of the historical journals yields radically altered details in the play as well as patterns of details not found in the journals.[1] These alterations and additions transform the reenactment of a physical expedition into the enactment of a spiritual journey—the quintessential twentieth-century journey.

The play opens and closes with the character Scott in front of the tent that will become his grave writing in his journals. Because the "Message to the Public" is an authentic journal entry, the seven words he articulates while composing in the prologue—"The causes of the

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disaster are these"[2]—create the impression that Acts I and II will dramatize these causes.

The impression is misleading. The historical document, the "Message to the Public" printed as the last entry in Scott's Antarctic journals, begins: "The causes of the disaster are not due to faulty organisation . . ." followed by the causes enumerated. The first is the loss of the pony transport in March 1911.[3] *Terra Nova*, however, makes no mention of the expedition's reliance on ponies to pull the heavy sledges; the loss of the transport; or the shooting of the remaining ponies some nine months later, the meat to be fed to the dogs, who went as far as the Lower Glacier Depot before returning to the base camp with one of the support parties, and stored in depots as provisions for the Polar party's return marches. From the opening scene therefore the play moves away from a strict reenactment of historical events, although these events remain the matrix from which the action develops.

One cause of many given in the historical document is the "astonishing failure" of Petty Officer Edgar Evans, but for whom the "advance party would have returned to the glacier in fine form and with surplus of food" (p. 476).

In the journal for January 7, 1912, Scott noted that Evans had a "nasty cut on his hand" from sledge-making. The next day he wrote, "Evans' hand was dressed this morning, and the rest ought to be good for it" (p. 416). Despite being deflated by the realization that Amundsen had beaten them to the Pole, the members of the Polar party were in good health as they began the return marches on January 18, until January 23, when they discovered that Evans' nose was frostbitten and his fingers blistering. From then on his condition deteriorated rapidly. In early February he was "dull and incapable" after falling (p. 437); days later he was "going steadily downhill" (p. 439); by February 13 he was powerless "to assist with camping work" (p. 444). He died on February 17. According to Scott's journals, Edward Wilson, the Polar party's medical doctor, opined that he died from brain injury suffered in one of his falls.[4] His death demoralized the others because he was the fittest of the group, but it eliminated the necessity for making a decision about how to proceed with him. As Scott explained, "The safety of the remainder seemed to demand his abandonment, but Providence mercifully removed him at this critical moment. He died a natural death, and we did not leave him till two hours after his death" (p. 462).

The petty officer's "astonishing failure" is the basis for Act I, but Tally has altered the details of this "failure" so radically that the dramatically conceived Edgar Evans bears little resemblance to the

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journals' Edgar Evans. The exterior action of *Terra Nova* covers the period January 15, 1912, to March 29, 1912, and, again in terms of the exterior action, contains only the Polar party. Act I opens the day before the discovery of the remains of Amundsen's camp by Scott and the four men chosen from the Summit party for the final assault on the Pole: Lieutenant Henry Bowers (added at the last minute to what should have been a four-man team), Captain Lawrence Oates, Evans, and Wilson. Act II closes with Scott, Wilson, and Bowers pinned down by a blizzard eleven miles from the One Ton Depot. Evans had died on February 17, one month earlier than Oates's heroic act of self-sacrifice.

Moments into the play, even before the character Scott announces that the date is January 15, Oates calls him aside to tell him that Evans is "not pulling his weight, sir" (p. 5). After Wilson dresses the wound, he describes the hand as "badly frostbitten." To Oates's question, "Gangrene?" the doctor answers, "Not yet," but the "fingers are swollen like sausages" (p. 16). While the commander goes into the tent to examine the petty officer's wound, the others, outside, discuss the implication. Oates introduces the theme of moral choice: "Evans knows his duty, same as the rest. If he was any sort of man, he'd do what has to be done" (p. 18). The injury means that since he cannot pull the manhauling sledge, the others must pull for him and on short rations.

Inside the tent Scott accuses Evans of putting his self-interest above that of the team by concealing the wound so that he would not be replaced on the Polar party and sent back with a support party. When the petty officer attempts to explain, Scott interrupts him: "Damn it, Evans, stop pretending! Your hand is dead, do you understand that? Dead! It's going to swell up and turn black and rot off your arm!" (p. 19). He then strikes Evans in the face.

Tally's conception of Evans transforms an "astonishing failure" of stamina in the journals into an astonishing failure of character in the play: by not apprising his companions of his injury, the petty officer has put his self-interest above a concern for the team's welfare. Tally also has added characterizations based on persons only referred to in the Antarctic journals. Yet they are not part of the exterior action. Because Amundsen and Scott's wife Kathleen appear only to the commander, either one's appearance onstage signals a shift to the play's interior action. When Scott leaves the tent, for example, he is visited by Amundsen. Together they review the situation: since Evans cannot survive, he must be abandoned. Scott at first agrees until, coming to his senses, he objects.

The party proceeds toward the Pole, periodically stopping for

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Evans to catch up. Once they realize that Amundsen has beaten them, Oates turns on Evans. His injury so slowed them down that it cost them the honor of being first. "How do you like this nice piece of work you—(*moving to Evans*)—weakling, you bloody pathetic liar—and coward!" (p. 27). Ignoring Scott's command to leave Evans alone, he squeezes the injured man's hand until he screams in pain. Bowers leaps on Oates and pulls him away from the collapsing petty officer.

Act I ends with the five men posing for the famous photograph of the British Antarctic team at the South Pole. Evans does not die until midway through Act II.

Another cause of many given in the historical document is the "sickening of a second companion, Captain Oates" (p. 477). Disabled by frostbite and knowing that he was holding back the others, on the morning of March 16, 1912, he walked out of the tent and into the blizzard. The previous Sunday, March 11, his condition forced the others to evaluate their own chances for survival. Scott "practically ordered" Wilson to hand over the opium tablets, which were distributed among the men, but by March 22 the three still alive had resolved to die "natural" deaths (pp. 460–63).

Act II is an almost faithful reenactment of these events, except that by expanding the scenes, Act II expands the theme of moral choice introduced by Oates in Act I to include being true to oneself; accepting one's fate, tragic or otherwise; and being responsible to others, even if that means self-sacrifice. On the verge of injecting Oates with a lethal dose of morphine, Scott desists because Oates regains consciousness, drinks some tea, and stumbles out of the tent. Amundsen then appears to convince Scott that opium is not for him; it is "for men who have no choice" (p. 53). Though the scene does not change, from Scott's comments it is clear that the three still alive have pushed on until pinned down by the blizzard, at which time the commander is, as he was in the prologue, composing the "Message to the Public."

Had Tally merely eliminated some of the causes to focus on others, the play still could be a docudrama. After all, conflict between men is more interesting than conflict between men and ponies. But as pointed out, Tally created the conflict; it is not in the journals. Of course, one could argue that he had to because without conflict, he had no drama. Yes, but he not only altered the details to create the conflict, he altered the chronology of events.

Leonard Huxley, the editor of *Scott's Last Expedition*, graphically illustrates the chronology in a footnote that moves from narrative analysis to table of distances contrasting the lengths of the outward and

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return marches. (Bear in mind that the return marches were expected to be faster and fewer. When all of the parties—advance and support—with ponies and dogs left the base camp, they were heavily laden with provisions to be dropped off at each depot for the return marches. By the time the Polar party was formed, Scott and his companions had lightened considerably the load on their manhauling sledges.) "The return journey on the Summit," Huxley summarizes, "had been made at good speed, taking twenty-one days as against twenty-seven going out, the last part of it, from Three Degree to Upper Glacier Depot, taking nearly eight marches as against ten, showing the first slight slackening as P. O. Evans and Oates began to feel the cold. . . ."[5]

The slackening did not begin until two weeks after the party left the Pole. Yet Tally has the slackening begin on the outward journey—before the party reaches the Pole. Clearly the playwright has structured *Terra Nova* into three units: approach to the Pole with conflict caused by Evans' failure of character; climax at the Pole followed by a banquet at which there is no food; resolution of the journey. To understand why Tally structured his play this way, we must examine both the play's interior action and the banquet scene.

The interior action takes the form of recurring daydreams in which Scott is visited by either Amundsen or Kathleen. Conceived in Dantean terms, they are Scott's guides through his inner life, but because *Terra Nova*, unlike the *Commedia*, is a staged play, their appearance is determined by drama's conventions. They appear as characters, but visible only to Scott, who spur him on his journey. The Norwegian explorer is the voice of reason—as when he defends the use of dogs because they can pull sledges and they can be converted to protein—and of conscience—as when he convinces the Englishman not to take opium. Kathleen is the wife Scott left in the garden, the woman to whom he wants to return. As he says to her, "I've been happier here, I think, in this garden—than anywhere else in my life" (p. 9). Each taunts him about his motivation. The former tells him that he knows the rules but "not one dark corner" of his heart (p. 23); the latter senses that inside him is a "fearful yearning" and a "kind of terror" (p. 39). Since none of these passages is in the journals, the effect of Tally's additions is to internalize the action, to underscore the spiritual journey into the unknown, which is initially the landscape of Antarctica but ultimately the landscape of man himself.

Stated as simply as possible, the journey in *Terra Nova* is a test of man's "unaided" (p. 6) ability—unaided by dogs, for example—to penetrate the unknown, to turn around, and to return home.

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The experience would seem to be a failure. Scott and his men have been beaten by the Norwegian team, and they must return 800 miles to the base camp unaided by dogs or any external support. For the play's climactic passage is spoken by Wilson at the Pole: "North—north in every direction. Think of that. (*Pause*) Strange that it's no different, really, from any other . . . I mean somehow I'd hoped—perhaps it might. . . . (*Pause*) Childish, I suppose" (p. 27). The unknown is not charged with significance; it is devoid of it. The journey is analogous to the experience in the snow in Wallace Stevens' "The Snow Man," where the listener, "nothing himself, beholds / Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is." I am not suggesting that Tally is echoing Stevens, but he has Bowers say, "I can't get used to that, the sound of nothing. If we were here a hundred years I'd never get used to it" (p. 42). When he writes in his own voice, explaining in the prologue the use of actual expedition slides for the play's setting, he describes the final one brightening until "it shows no contrasts at all, but is just a blank square of light."

Act I ends with the Polar party at the South Pole. Act II opens with the five men, in formal evening dress, celebrating what is presumably the mission's successful completion. Evans proposes a toast, Scott makes a speech, and all eagerly await the serving of the meal—until Amundsen announces, "There is no food" (p. 35).

The banquet scene is unquestionably theatrical. When Amundsen, who up to this point has appeared as a "dicey-lookin' " French waiter (p. 33), lifts the edge of the tablecloth, the table is revealed to be the sledge, which, given its rectangular shape, is a hearse. But the scene is not a trick to catch an audience off-guard after intermission. Scott's ill-fated adventure is common knowledge; what is not, what Tally cannot expect theatergoers to be familiar with, is the record of the adventure kept by Scott. The scene therefore is not played to disabuse the audience of the belief that Scott and his companions survived the expedition. It does, however, force the audience to recognize that the historical experience is being recast, for this is the play's one interior scene in which Amundsen appears to the five men. It takes only a moment's reflection to realize that since the Polar party cannot be having a collective dream, the journey has been radically transformed.

With the banquet's dissolution, the Polar party must return to the pitiless Antarctic wasteland. There is no nutritional sustenance to get them home. Neither is there external spiritual sustenance in the universe of *Terra Nova*, so that each man is really being forced to confront his im ediate self.

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Then why not abandon Evans the instant he slackens? Why not inject Oates with a lethal dose of morphine the instant his feet are frostbitten? If Amundsen's party can kill dogs for protein, why not cannibalize the weakest? In a universe devoid of transcendence, what difference does it make?

Humanity makes the difference; humanity dictates moral choice. When Scott comes to his senses after agreeing with Amundsen that Evans should be abandoned, he takes his stand at the threshold separating responsibility from expediency because he knows that should he cross the threshold—scale the wall—he no longer will be human. "There's a wall. I can see myself approaching from a great distance—and at last I come to it. On this side I'm something like myself. On the other side I'm lost. I have no name. (*Pause*) Can't you understand? Where is the point at which the entire thing becomes worthless? After one man dies? After two?" (p. 22).

Rather than being a docudrama about one of the last chapters from the heroic age of exploration, *Terra Nova* is a twentieth-century existential drama in the mainstream that Richard Gilman traces in his study of modern drama. Particularly relevant is his statement about Georg Büchner's informing vision in *Wozzeck*: "Just as he had done in *Danton's Death*, Büchner drew from the historical record only what he needed in order to construct a new 'fact,' his imagination's rebuke to history's having finished off the case with such finality."[6] Bereft of support because the provisions stored at the depots turn out to be inadequate, the Polar party must trek across 800 miles of alien landscape under conditions hostile to life—only to die. Death is the journey's goal whether at the blank South Pole or in a raging blizzard eleven miles south of One Ton Depot. Yet in an image worthy of Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus*, the men continue to drag their sledge long after it has served any purpose, just as, in an image worthy of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, they continue to "huddle together for warmth," even though each is "still alone" (p. 53).[7]

An existential drama is enacted on the "close to a bare stage." Five actors, wearing Antarctic gear, haul a sledge across the stage. After Evans dies, there are four; after Oates's death, three. Periodically Amundsen or Kathleen appears onstage. When Scott drifts into a daydream to talk to either one, his companions remain motionless or go about tasks such as assembling the tent. With the exterior action's resumption, the men haul the sledge, huddle together, record journal entries on their journey to death, but the journey is not meaningless because the men have found an inner strength, a will to endure. Hence

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by Act II, *Terra Nova* refers to the new land within: the landscape of self-discovery. And it is Evans, whose character failed in Act I, who shows the way in Act II. Suffering from concussion and gangrene, he nevertheless keeps moving by putting "one foot in front of the other" (p. 37). And when he can no longer continue moving forward, he sings, "'Eternal father strong to save, / Whose arm doth bind the restless wave. . . .'" Scott cries out, "Christ Jesus," and Oates chants the *Kyrie eleison*: "Lord have mercy on us, Christ have mercy on us, saints have mercy on us all . . ." (pp. 44–46).

Evans' death frees the others to keep going, one foot in front of the other, until death claims them, naturally and with dignity. Oates throws himself into the blizzard, and the others push on until they can go no further. True to himself and responsible to the end, Scott, in the play's most poignant passage, writes to his wife:

> My darling Kath—I want you to know I shall not have suffered any pain. We simply stop being. Therefore you mustn't imagine any great tragedy. You know I cherish no sentimental rubbish about remarriage. When the right man comes along to help you in life you ought to be happy again. I wasn't a very good husband, but I hope I shall be a good memory. (p. 55)

In a universe in which man himself must charge the unknown with significance, self-discovery is the goal of the twentieth-century quest, and humanity the model and standard. The South Pole is blank, and the play's setting, as Tally indicates in the production notes, should suggest "abstraction." For the quester who has confronted the unknown, however, life is neither blank nor abstract. "Where will you find the rules?" Amundsen asks following the abortive banquet, to which Scott replies, "In myself" (p. 35).

Paradoxically, responding to life, choosing life as it is existentially embodied, energizes the imagination, which by filling in the blank space and adding specificity to the abstract setting becomes capable of immortalizing. By cradling the dead Evans in their arms, his companions sculpt an Antarctic Pietà. And at play's end, while Scott writes the last of his journal entries, Amundsen sketches a portrait of Viking veneration:

> Far away, on the Great Ice Shelf, your bodies lie still where they fell—perfectly preserved, fresh as life, magical. You, who were so afraid of ageing! And every year as the Shelf builds itself outwards, you move a few feet closer to the edge, where the great chunks of iceberg break off into the sea. . . . One day a great crystal barge will break away and carry you off, Scott, like a

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> Viking king surrounded by his lieutenants. Then together you'll sail northwards at last, into warm seas, into the sun again. North, towards home. . . . (p. 57)

The published edition of *Terra Nova* contains an excerpt from *The Edwardians* in which J. B. Priestley notes that had Scott beaten Amundsen to the Pole and then returned to England, he soon would have been forgotten. What thrills one, he goes on, is the "idea of Scott and his companions doomed in that remote howling wilderness of snow and ice." I would like to alter a detail in this excerpt. What fires the imagination in *Terra Nova* is not that Scott and his companions are doomed but that on a landscape inimical to humanity, their humanity triumphs.

[1] In earlier (1977) unpublished form, the work was known as *Heart in the Ice*. As *Terra Nova* the play was produced by Playwrights Horizons, Inc., and the American Place Theater Off-Broadway in New York in 1984.

[2] Ted Tally, *Terra Nova* (London: Samuel French, 1981), pp. x and 54. Hereafter to be cited in the text.

[3] *Scott's Last Expedition*: *The Personal Journals of Captain R. F. Scott, R. N., C. V. O., on His Journey to the South Pole*, ed. Leonard Huxley (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1925), p. 476.

[4] Wilson kept his own journal. Although his entry for February 17, 1912, merely records Evans' death, his entry for the preceding day explains the petty officer's collapse that day as having "much to do with the fact that he has never been sick in his life and is now helpless with his hands frost-bitten." *Edward Wilson, Diary of the Terra Nova Expedition to the Antarctic*: *1910–1912*, ed. H. G. R. King (New York: Humanities Press, 1972), p. 243.

[5] Huxley, *Scott's Last Expedition*, p. 499, n. 26.

[6] Richard Gilman, *The Making of Modern Drama* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1987), p. 33.

[7] The British Antarctic Expedition's mission, in addition to being first at the South Pole, was scientific exploration. When the search party from the base camp discovered the bodies of Scott, Wilson, and Bowers, they "recovered all their gear and dug out the sledge with their belongings on it. Amongst these were 35 lbs. of very important geological specimens which had been collected on the moraines of the Beardmore Glacier; at Doctor Wilson's request they had stuck to these up to the very end, even when disaster stared them in the face and they knew that the specimens were so much weight added to what they had to pull." Surgeon E. L. Atkinson, R.N., "The Finding of the Dead," in Huxley, *Scott's Last Expedition*, pp. 466–67.

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History and the "Here and Now": The Novels of Graham Swift

Del Ivan Janik

The publication of three novels within a period of four years marked the debut of Graham Swift, who has already established himself as a major novelist and may prove to be the most outstanding English novelist of the final quarter of the twentieth century. *The Sweet-Shop Owner* (1980) and *Shuttlecock* (1981) both received highly favorable reviews; *Waterland* was chosen as the best English novel of 1983 by the *Guardian* and was short-listed for that year's Booker Prize. In his novels and in the short stories collected in *Learning to Swim* (1982) Swift has begun to establish for an unpromising swath of South London the kind of fictional superreality that is implied in the phrases "Hardy's Wessex" and "Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha." The South London of Swift's novels has the same kind of physical presence and the same potential for mythical status as the Nottinghamshire of Lawrence or the Dublin of Joyce. Like those places it gains in intensity from its very ordinariness, which in *Waterland* is set off by the flatness—concealing human and elemental drama—of the Fen country of East Anglia. Swift's characters, too, are ordinary—on the surface they might seem hopelessly dull—but their experiences and their responses to experience cut to some of the central issues of life.

Through Swift's three novels there runs a concern for the meaning of history, in itself and especially in contrast with the immediate present, the Here and Now; related to this concern is the recurrent theme of the value and danger of knowledge.[1] Except perhaps in *Shuttlecock*, the issues the novels raise remain unresolved, and the fact that the narrative, thematic, and symbolic neatness of *Shuttlecock* was followed by the expansiveness and complexity of *Waterland* is a good

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omen for Swift's further growth as a writer. *The Sweet-Shop Owner* is, not surprisingly, the least technically ambitious of the three. It depicts the final day in the life of Willy Chapman, the owner of two sweetshops in an unidentified middle-class section of South London, interspersed with flashbacks to earlier events from his schoolboy days in 1931 to the fictional present, a sunny June day in 1974. The novel's abrupt shifting of time and point of view is reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's narrative technique in *Mrs. Dalloway*, and Swift, like Woolf, communicates a sense of the seamlessness of experience—which is particularly appropriate for Willy, a character who has changed very little in forty-three years.

The Sweet-Shop Owner is also reminiscent of another early-modern British novel, Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*, in that like Ford's it is a story of defective hearts. Will Chapman and his wife Irene, unlike Florence Dowell and Edward Ashburnham, do actually die of physical heart disorders, but like Ford's characters Swift's suffer more poignantly from an absence of "heart" in the metaphoric sense. When Willy commits suicide by purposely overstraining his weak heart he ends a life in which all attempts at the expression of love had been thwarted. His marriage to Irene, a beautiful, well-to-do young woman who had been left emotionally damaged by a rape, was a bargain whose terms she established immediately: she would give him her beauty, her body, a home and shop, a pattern of work and leisure in material comfort, and, eventually, a daughter who she vainly hoped might make up for her lack of warmth; in return Willy would play the outward role of the husband but would never seek—indeed never offer—love.

The pattern of emotional distance established on their honeymoon lasted nearly four decades, until Irene's death from heart failure, and it was perpetuated in the next generation. Their daughter Dorry, far from becoming the emotional substitute Irene had hoped to offer Willy, inherited her mother's coldness with her beauty. She grew up resenting her mother's indifference and her father's weakness, and nine months after her mother's death she returned home in secret from Bristol, where she lived with a graduate student of history, to carry off Irene's clothes, furs, and jewelry. The extent to which Willy's own values have been shaped by Irene's example is demonstrated by his response to Dorry's rejection of him. He sends her £15,000, in the hope that the gift will prompt a reconciliation. After two months of disappointment he decides, on Dorrie's twenty-fifth birthday, to kill himself by bringing on a heart attack.

Willy becomes representative by his total lack of distinction; he is the kind of person one meets daily across a counter without remarking

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anything but a few superficial traits: an ever solemn expression, a limp acquired in a fall from a ladder. Even as a schoolboy he had avoided distinction, having formulated the survival plan that later fitted him so well as a husband for Irene:

> So that he didn't mind about his school reports (he was only good at woodwork and distance running) or that his parents were disappointed, or that those others around him in that chalky class-room would get on better than him. Let them go to meet history. History would come anyway. Nothing touches you, you touch nothing.[2]

Willy is passive, like a puppet, continuing for months after Irene's death to walk through the routine she had established for him. She had found him a journeyman printer who was content to take orders and to create order with ink on paper: "He planned nothing, though every day had its pattern and was spent in making patterns" (*SSO*, p. 25). She gave him new patterns, first the predictable formulas of courtship, then the routine of the shopkeeper who specialized in ephemera: tobacco, sweets, newspapers, and magazines; "none of it—that was the beauty of it—was either useful or permanent" (*SSO*, p. 18). Life became for Willy a series of patterns: the patterns of activity in the High Street, the habits of his employees and customers, the pattern of Irene's progressive illness, the pattern of Dorry's progressive estrangement.

Seen as pattern, experience begins to seem false, a matter of going through the motions, of playing a role; and Willy is acutely aware of the unreality of the patterns he has adopted. From the beginning, he sees that his work as a shopkeeper is a disguise behind which he and Irene both hide. Even on his last day, Willy is playing a part. Having announced to his assistant's amazement that he will walk rather than drive to his second shop with the week's pay packets, he steps on to the Common "as if entering some long-rehearsed scene" (*SSO*, p. 173), and as he walks with difficulty in the hot afternoon sun past his old school he recalls the mile race he had won years before:

> The race is decided. It's over as soon as it starts. They think it's a battle but it's only a performance. They think it's action but it's only a pattern. You move and keep your eyes on what is fixed. (*SSO*, p. 197)

When he returns to his main shop, exhausted and suffering from angina, he serves his last few customers in the usual way; "You had to perform to the last" (*SSO*, p. 210). It is only when the shop is closed that he can begin to put off his role:

> Half-past five. It seemed as if he were making his escape. He had

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> always known it would be like this. Tomorrow they would discover the fraud, the deception: the costume discarded, the things left untouched so as to make it seem nothing had changed. . . . He felt like a conjuror, amidst his tricks, for whom, alone, there is no illusion. (*SSO*, pp. 212–13)

Willy Chapman's attempt to define—or conceal—himself in patterns and playacting is in part an attempt to reconcile his feelings of being both a part of and apart from history. The theme of the relationship of the individual to history that dominates *Waterland* is present in embryonic form in *The Sweet-Shop Owner*. Willy reflects at the beginning of his last day that he will soon be history, yet nothing will change; as he later recalls thinking as a schoolboy, there is no point in seeking distinction, in going to "meet history": "I didn't believe, in spite of being at grammar school, that the future belonged to me. I thought: things would come to you anyway, and when they did they would already be turned into history" (*SSO*, p. 189).

He had been a poor student, especially of history, yet in attempting small talk with Dorry's lover he asserts, "History. Now I've always been fascinated by history" (*SSO*, p. 179). If that is true, the fascination manifests itself as an apparent indifference. At several points in the novel the narrator calls attention to the headlines of the newspapers Willy deftly folds and hands to his customers, but Willy only read the headlines so that he would not appear completely ignorant if a customer should mention one of the day's events; Willy liked the newspapers for their "columns, captions, and neat gradations of print," the "patterns" into which the world's events could be gathered. Irene read the papers, but "not because she liked news. It was only to take stock, to acquaint herself, to hold sway over the array of facts and regard them all with cold passivity" (*SSO*, p. 17).

On their honeymoon in 1937 Irene had announced, turning from the papers, "There will be a war, Willy," and when it came both Willy and Irene were essentially untouched by it. Willy was sent off to an army camp in Hampshire to parcel out helmets and sidepacks and Irene counted ration books for the Food Office, but war—living history—remained an abstraction. "History was drawing up its inventory. . . . What was the connection? What war? What action?" (*SSO*, p. 79). The large events which become the stuff of history have no immediate meaning.

For Willy history is another pattern with which to screen out private reality; for Irene, history is a refuge:

> No, it wasn't war, destruction that she feared. It almost protected

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> her, that great ominous blackness, as if she knew where she stood with it—shielded her from sunlight; and she was saved, perhaps, so long as there were bulletins and blackness . . . from bright moments which urged: No, there is beauty, we do not belong to history. (*SSO*, p. 60)

History can provide escape exactly because of its irrelevance to the everyday experience of the ordinary individual. That in life which is most real, sometimes most fulfilling but often most painful, is expressed not in terms of history but in the spots of time, the moments, in which personal experience is concentrated: what in *Waterland* Swift calls the Here and Now. The most explicit exposition of this idea comes in one of Willy's mental addresses to Dorry:

> What was the name of that thesis you were writing, Dorry? "Romantic Poetry and the Sense of History"? And now you are living with a historian. What do you learn from history, Dorry? Was it history that made you come and plunder your father's house? Or the opposite? Did you want to escape history, to put it all behind you—me; her, those twenty-odd years in that house? To have your moment, your victory at last, with one wild gesture? But—don't you see?— it's the moment (framed in the doorway with your heavy box of loot) that captures you. . . . Don't you see, you're no freer than before, no freer than I am? And the only thing that can dissolve history now is if, by a miracle, you come. (*SSO*, pp. 216–17)

The moment, the Here and Now, may bring transfiguration; more often it will bring pain; but it is the locus of real meaning. At several points in the novel Willy returns to a phrase that reflects the intense reality of the Now, the moment in which meaning coalesces. Early in the war Irene's family gathers in her parents' garden to pose for a photograph. Willy, not wanted in the pictures, focuses the camera: "The moment captured: gallant figures locked in the view-finder. Why did he wince holding the camera? All right. Now!" (*SSO*, p. 74). The phrase appears again when Willy, walking painfully across the Common, recalls his one triumph, as a schoolboy runner in competition with an unfamiliar dark-haired boy whose sister he later marries: "He could force him back, if he wanted to run faster. The power was there. Thirty yards to go. Neck to neck. Sun in their eyes. Twenty, fifteen. All right. Now" (*SSO*, p. 198). The novel ends with another such moment, as Willy sits at home transfixed and helpless in an armchair, and with the phrase that now reflects the balance of remembrance and immediacy that Willy has achieved in the course of a day during which, with

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periods of exertion and rest, tablets of digitalis used to counteract a punishing walk in the sun, he has timed his own death:

> Can you capture the moment without it capturing you? His chest was transfixed. You stood on the edge of the diving-board. It seemed you might be poised there forever. He couldn't move. He was a powerless skittle towards which was hurtling an invisible ball. Not yet. You stood on your toes, raised your arms. She will not come. The lilac shimmered. The garden framed in the window was like a photograph.
>
> All right. All right—now. (*SSO*, p. 222)

The relationship of history to the present moment forms a more prominent theme in *Shuttlecock*, Swift's second novel, and it is an important factor underlying the book's structure. The title leads one to think again of Ford's *The Good Soldier*, in which Nancy Rufford, the ward of Edward and Leonora Ashburnham, goes mad after Edward's suicide and is able to speak only the phrase "Credo in unum Deum Omnipotentem" and the word "Shuttlecocks"—the latter a reflection of her earlier feeling that she had been tossed back and forth between the "violent personalities" of her guardians.[3] Swift's novel is named after a book of war memoirs written by the father of Prentis, Swift's protagonist and narrator. Prentis' Dad, as he invariably calls him, had during World War II been an undercover agent whose missions caused him to be shuttled back and forth between England and occupied France: his book's dust jacket bore the image of a parachutist, painted to resemble a badminton shuttlecock, presumably being dropped behind enemy lines. The image applies also to Prentis himself, who feels in his work as a police archivist that he is being tossed about like a plaything, and who in his personal life is buffeted by his feelings for Dad, who now lives in a mental hospital because he (like Ford's Nancy Rufford) has withdrawn into silence, and his wife and children, who fear his outbursts of temper and seem to have lost all affection and respect for him. The narrative structure resembles that of *The Good Soldier* in that Prentis, the narrator, begins to write his story in an attempt to understand his circumstances, without knowing where the tale will lead him. Like Ford's John Dowell, he learns new facts and gains new insights as he writes about events that are unfolding in the fictional present. He is, like Dowell, an unattractive character. His opening description of the way in which he tormented a pet hamster named Sammy when he was a child is an appropriate introduction to a man who resents, fears, and suspects his superior at work, bullies his children, and virtually ignores his wife when he is not leading her into

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unspecified but apparently quite eccentric forms of sexual experimentation. Unlike Dowell, however, Prentis seems to be a reliable narrator; at the end of his tale Dowell still finds it a mystery; Prentis chooses to let some important mysteries remain, but he does so with a clear understanding of the consequences.

Prentis is a historian of a kind, for his work consists of answering inquiries from the police and the courts by researching the records of "dead crimes," unsolved crimes which, usually because the principals have died, have ceased to be acted upon. History begins to become real and pressing for Prentis when Quinn, his superior, starts giving him assignments that lead him toward files involving circumstances apparently related to Prentis' Dad. At the same time, in an attempt to understand the reasons for his father's "linguistic coma" Prentis rereads his memoirs—in fact becomes obsessed by them—and begins to see connections between Dad's wartime activities and the individuals referred to in the mysterious files. Past and present meet in other ways as well. The images of Dad's confinement as a prisoner of war recall Prentis' own feelings of being closed in: within the high walls of his garden at home, in the underground on the way to work, and especially in the archives where he and his colleagues work in a cellar beneath the sidewalks of Central London. Prentis feels himself tortured in the way—if not to the degree—that the Nazis had tortured Dad and that he, as a boy, had tortured Sammy the hamster. Prentis had manipulated Sammy much as he feels Quinn is manipulating him in sending him on wild-goose chases for missing files while holding before him the prospect of promotion to Quinn's own position.

In a further parallel, reminiscent of Joyce's story "Counterparts," Prentis treats his sons as Quinn treats him, setting them pointless tasks in the garden as punishment for failing to greet him when he comes home. Meanwhile he treats his wife Marian almost as a prostitute while he sentimentalizes over the lost passionate innocence of their love-making by the seashore years before. Powerless and put upon at work, he acts like a tyrant at home, albeit one who recognizes and is ashamed of his tyranny.

Prentis' historical research in Dad's memoirs and Quinn's files becomes a quest for understanding, not only of Dad but also of himself and his motivations. He recognizes that part of his discontent comes from having a hero for a father; even now he goes to Dad as to a confessor, seeking explanation if not absolution, and he keeps trying, as he reads Dad's account of his wartime exploits, to put himself in his place. He measures himself against Dad and inevitably comes up short:

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> Sometimes . . . I would reflect that, in the possibility of exposing singlehandedly some malpractice in the office, lay the opportunity of bringing into my life a faint note of daring, decision—integrity. But then, supposing my gamble failed? And I *wanted* that promotion. . . . And then it would strike me that there were really two promotions I wanted. For, quite apart from prospects at work, I wanted to step into Dad's shoes. . . . And then there was Quinn. . . . I wanted his job. I wanted to sit in his leather chair. I wanted to look down, like him, through his glass panel, at the underlings I had once worked beside. And yet it seemed . . . that what I wanted was not so much the promotion itself, but to be in a position where I would *know*; where I would no longer be the victim, the dupe, no longer be in the dark.[4]

When Prentis' quest for knowledge and self-knowledge finally leads him to confront Quinn about the mysterious files, Quinn's revelations remake Prentis' life, thrusting him into the Here and Now, one of "those moments which made you realize life won't ever be the same again" (*S*, p. 171). Prentis learns three things: first, that Quinn has been "withholding—or destroying—information [from the archives] so as to spare people—needless painful knowledge" (*S*, p. 176); second, that he is to be promoted to Quinn's position; and finally, that there is considerable evidence in the files that Dad may have betrayed his fellow agents in order to be allowed to escape from the Nazis. Prentis also learns that the implications of knowledge—of "knowing"—are considerably more complex than he realized:

> I was experiencing the capsizing feeling that the very thing I sought most—Quinn's job—was the thing I wanted least. The old suspicion that Quinn was mad—and, in his shoes, I would be mad too. For a moment, I really wanted to be ignorant, an irresponsible underling. (*S*, p. 177)

But Prentis now *has* knowledge, partial knowledge, of his father's secret, and he is faced with a choice: to confront Dad with what he knows in the hope that it will shock him out of his silence, or to remain silent himself and avoid causing Dad more pain. Quinn offers another choice. He has withheld unread a crucial file containing letters that may lead to conclusive proof of Dad's guilt or innocence, and he proposes that he and Prentis should destroy it, on the ground that "perhaps uncertainty is always better than either certainty or ignorance" (*S*, p. 197). Prentis chooses uncertainty, burning the file in a garden incinerator.

Prentis' decision turns out to be liberating, enabling, and even redeeming. On the way home he experiences a feeling of having "emerged out of some confinement" (*S*, p. 203). Earlier, in trying to

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explain his childhood torturing of his pet hamster, his surliness toward his children, and his manipulation of his wife he had observed, "We are all looking for a space where we can be free, where we cannot be reached, where we are masters" (*S*, p. 36). Now, in the acceptance of uncertainty, of the ambiguity that comes with being human, Prentis has found that space. He no longer badgers his mute father with unanswerable questions, having found "the perfect balance" of mutual ignorance. He no longer bullies his children, having learned to accept their need for space in which *they* can mature. He returns to his wife with affection instead of domination and "pointless sophistication." He is able now to live in the present, not because he has conquered history but because he has learned to live with its ambiguities.

Swift's first two novels thus are explorations of related questions, within a restricted scope. In *The Sweet-Shop Owner* both a brooding immersion in the past and a failure to acknowledge one's part in history come to seem equally destructive, and the only resolution Willy Chapman can find is suicide. In *Shuttlecock* Prentis undertakes a direct confrontation with history and finds that it is not knowledge but the acceptance of uncertainty that is humanizing; ambiguity enables him to live in the Here and Now.

Swift's third novel deals with some of the same issues, both more explicitly and with greater complexity. *Waterland*'s epigraph is a definition of the Latin word *historia*: "*Historia*, æ, f. 1. Inquiry, investigation, learning. 2. a) a narrative of past events, history. b) any kind of narrative: account, tale, story." All three parts of the definition are relevant to the novel. The narrator, Thomas Crick, is a history teacher who comes from a family of storytellers who lived in a "fairy-tale place," the Fens of East Anglia. His story is both a history lesson, a series of tales, and an inquiry; it also incorporates a series of lessons in the *natural* history of its setting, a place remarkable for both its ordinariness and its mystery, a landscape that is the nearest possible equivalent to water, "a landscape which of all landscapes, most approximates to Nothing":

> The Fens were formed by silt. . . . For centuries the Fens were a network of swamps and brackish lagoons. . . . What silt began, man continued. Land reclamation. Drainage. But you do not reclaim a land overnight. You do not reclaim a land without difficulty and without ceaseless effort and vigilance. The Fens are still being reclaimed even to this day. Strictly speaking, they are never reclaimed, only being reclaimed.[5]

From the outset the Here and Now of the Fens and the process of land

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reclamation on which they depend are contrasted with what we normally think of as history: "So forget, indeed, your revolutions, your turning-points, your grand metamorphoses of history. Consider, instead, the slow and arduous process, the interminable and ambiguous process—of land reclamation" (*W*, pp. 7–8). But *Waterland* takes place in a shifting fairy-tale country, and the contrasts turn out not to be so simple.

On one level, *Waterland* is a series of history lessons, the lessons Crick teaches in the last few weeks before he is forced into early retirement after thirty-two years. As such, they are often wildly inappropriate: the nominal topic of his class is the French Revolution, but he alludes to it rarely, only to illustrate a point about the family and personal events that form most of the narrative's substance. On another level, *Waterland* is a manifestation of man's need to tell stories to keep reality under control, and Crick can be seen in much the same light as Prentis, a man telling his story in an attempt to cope with its implications.

The novel's structure is rambling and recursive, intermixing episodes from three major elements. The first of these elements is a history of the Fenland and of the prominent entrepreneurial Atkinson family and the obscure, plodding Crick family, from the seventeenth century to the marriage of the narrator's parents after World War I. The second consists of events of the 1940s: Mary Metcalf's adolescent sexual experimentation with Tom Crick and his "potato-head" half brother Dick (who in his demented father/grandfather's eyes is the "Saviour of the World"), Dick's murder of Freddie Parr, Mary's abortion, Tom's revelation of Dick's incestuous conception and Dick's consequent suicide by drowning, Tom's return from the war and his marriage to Mary. The final element involves events of 1980, the narrative present: Mary's religious visions, her kidnapping of a baby (whom she calls a "child of God") from a supermarket, her committal to a mental institution, and Tom's loss of his position as a history teacher. The structure is not chaotic, for each of these three major elements, as it comes to the forefront of the narrative, is treated more or less chronologically; but as a whole the novel conforms to Tom's characterization of history: "It goes in two directions at once. It goes backwards as it goes forwards. It loops. It takes detours" because "there are no compasses for journeying in time" (*W*, p. 102).

Tom Crick's stories, which would form a continuous narrative if they were rearranged chronologically, are also interrelated by a number of parallels that resemble in kind but far exceed in complexity the

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recurring images of confinement in *Shuttlecock*. One set of parallels involves the concept of history itself, with its emphasis on constructions like Rise and Fall or Revolution. Tom Crick occasionally returns, in his classes, to the subject of the French Revolution:

> Children, do you remember . . . how I explained to you the implications of that word "revolution"? A turning round, a completing of a cycle. How I told you that though the popular notion of a revolution is that of categorical change, transformation—a progressive leap into the future—yet almost every revolution contains within it an opposite if less obvious tendency: the idea of a return. A redemption; a restoration. A reaffirmation of what is pure and fundamental against what is decadent and false. A return to a new beginning. . . . (*W*, p. 103)

As Robespierre and Marat sought not a futurist utopia but a return to an idealized Rome, Crick's students demand his reinstatement when the headmaster acts out their spoken contempt for the subject of history; generations of Cricks devote themselves to reclamation of the land; the last Atkinson brewer seeks to reproduce the purity of his family's original ale; and Mary Metcalf tries in a Lewisham supermarket to regain the motherhood she had relinquished more than three decades before in a filthy Fenland cottage. The parallels are indirect and inexact, redolent not of literary contrivance but of Tom Crick's notion of history as a series of loops and detours in the journey through time.

The duality of History and the Here and Now that played an important role in Swift's first two novels comes to the forefront in *Waterland*, and virtually all of the elements of the novel contribute to Swift's exploration of this theme. Tom Crick's meditations lead him to define and redefine history, in ways that are sometimes contradictory but from which a pattern ultimately emerges. History is, in the first instance, an academic subject that is about to be retrenched at Crick's school because the headmaster considers it "a rag-bag of pointless information" (*W*, p. 16). While Crick admits that history is distinct from the usually much less eventful everyday reality, that it is "reality-obscuring drama," he nevertheless insists on its value in helping us to shape our responses to that reality: "even if we miss the grand repertoire of history, yet we imitate it in miniature and endorse, in miniature, its longing for presence, for feature, for purpose, for content" (*W*, p. 31).

Confronted by a rebellious class that doubts the value of history, that asks in effect "Why the past?," Crick at first resorts to the pat answer that the "Why?" itself is the reason for studying history, that

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man is "the animal which asks Why." But in the face of present reality—a job that is about to disappear, students who are convinced that history is about to end in nuclear holocaust, and a wife who has lost her sanity—he is less confident about history as explanation; perhaps it is only a matter of telling stories and *hoping* to find meaning through them. The study of history is also an attempt at reclamation, based on the desire to "discover how you've become what you are. If you're lucky you might find out why. If you're lucky—but it's impossible—you might get back to where you can begin again. Revolution" (*W*, p. 235). History is a matter of reflection, the attempt to retrieve or find or impose logic and order on what is neither logical nor orderly; it is the creation of public reality.

But as Tom Crick states early and keeps demonstrating, "history is a thin garment, easily punctured by a knife blade called Now" (*W*, p. 27). That other realm, the immediate life-transforming moment, the Here and Now, is history's mirror image: it is a matter of chance or impulse; its logic is the logic of madness or of nonsense; it is and creates the most intense kind of *private* reality. Price, the self-appointed leader of Crick's bored and rebellious students, introduces the term when he insists, "What matters is the here and now," setting Crick to wondering just what "this much-adduced Here and Now" really is:

> How many times, children, do we enter the Here and Now? How many times does the Here and Now pay us visits? It comes so rarely that it is never what we imagine, and it is the Here and Now that turns out to be the fairy tale, not History, whose substance is at least forever determined and unchangeable. For the Here and Now has more than one face. It was the Here and Now which by the banks of the Hockwell Lode with Mary Metcalf unlocked for me realms of candor and rapture. But it was the Here and Now also which pinioned me with fear when livid-tinted blood, drawn by a boat-hook, appeared on Freddie Parr's right temple. (*W*, p. 45)

The Here and Now is not simply present daily life, as Price would have it; "life includes a lot of empty space. We are one-tenth living tissue, nine-tenths water; life is one-tenth Here and Now, nine-tenths a history lesson." The Here and Now comes in "surprise attacks" that "bring both joy and terror" and "for a brief and giddy interval announce that time has taken us prisoner" (*W*, pp. 45–46).

History and the Here and Now thus are not opposites but polarities, two aspects of experience. Both emerge out of the empty space of daily life. Making history, like the Atkinsons, and telling stories

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about it, like the Cricks, are two different ways to outwit the emptiness we glimpse (and fear) at the heart of reality; to "assure ourselves that . . . things are happening" (*W*, p. 30). It was a series of surprise attacks of the Here and Now in the summer of 1943—Freddie's murder, Mary's pregnancy and her abortion, Dick's suicide—that seriously involved Tom Crick in the study of history, which had seemed only a set of fairy tales:

> Until the Here and Now gave a sudden urgency to my studies. Until the Here and Now, gripping me by the arm, slapping my face and telling me to take a good look at the mess I was in, informed me that history was no invention but indeed existed—and I had become part of it. (*W*, p. 46)

The Here and Now—the moment of penetrating, inescapable reality in which one is poignantly alive and aware—thrusts one into history, the equally inescapable awareness that decisions are irrevocable and actions have consequences.

History and the Here and Now have the same sources, the most potent of which is curiosity. It was Tom's curiosity about his forebears, the Atkinsons and Cricks, his need for an explanation, that led to the stories he tells in *Waterland*, and it was Mary's sexual curiosity that led to the series of events that touched off the need:

> Curiosity which, with other things, distinguishes us from the animals, is an ingredient in love: It is a vital force. Curiosity, which bogs us down in arduous meditations and can lead to the writing of history books, will also, on occasion, as on that afternoon by the Hockwell Lode, reveal to us that which we seldom glimpse unscathed (for it appears more often—dead bodies, boat-hooks—dressed in terror): the Here and Now. (*W*, p. 38)

Curiosity is endangering, but it is also potentially redemptive. It is their lack of curiosity that most worries Crick about Price and his other students:

> Children [he warns them,] be curious. Nothing is worse (I know it) than when curiosity stops. Nothing is more repressive than the repression of curiosity. Curiosity begets love. It weds us to the world. It's part of our perverse, madcap love for this impossible planet we inhabit. People die when curiosity goes. People have to find out, people have to know. (*W*, p. 155)

Curiosity in its manifestation as the study of history contributes to the preservation of life and its value. Tom Crick explains to Price that he became a teacher of history because of his discovery, in the rubble of postwar Germany, that civilization is precious: "an artifice—so easily

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knocked down—but precious." History does not promise endless progress, in fact it tends to teach that "the same old things will repeat themselves," and it thereby offers a model of worthwhile human endeavor. A person, a generation, a people have been successful if "they've tried and so prevented things slipping. If they haven't let the world get any *worse*" (*W*, p. 181). Crick expands on this idea when he addresses the school on the occasion of his forced retirement:

> There's this thing called progress. But it doesn't progress. It doesn't go anywhere. Because as progress progresses the world can slip away. My humble model for progress is the reclamation of land. Which is repeatedly, never-endingly retrieving what is lost. A dogged and vigilant business. A dull yet valuable business. A hard, inglorious business. But you shouldn't go mistaking the reclamation of land for the building of empires. (*W*, pp. 253–54)

The *Rosa II*, the silt-dredger where Dick Crick works and dies, is a reclaimer of land, performing the work of staying even, the unglamorous but essential business of "scooping up from the depths this remorseless stuff that time leaves behind" (*W*, p. 261). The student of history has the same task: to keep scooping up the detritus of time in the attempt, if not to get ahead, at least not to leave things worse than they were. In his last confused, drunken hours on the dredger Dick unconsciously acts out that imperative:

> He's here. He knows his place. He knows his station. He keeps the ladder turning, the buckets scooping. . . . And the smell of silt is the smell of sanctuary, is the smell of amnesia. He's here, he's now. Not there or then. No past, no future. He's the mate of the *Rosa II*.
>
> And he's the saviour of the world. . . . (*W*, p. 268)

Considering the nature of Dick's work, the valediction is only partially ironic. In two of *Waterland*'s crucial events—Dick's death and the return of the child Mary kidnapped—the Here and Now and the principles of history meet and clash, with uncertain results. The "Saviour of the World" drowns himself, and the "child of God" is restored to his natural mother and an ordinary life. The world cannot afford saviors, cannot support them. The only salvation is in the continual task of reclamation of the land.

Waterland continues explorations that Swift had begun in his earlier novels, though without dropping a final curtain as in *The Sweet-Shop Owner* or even coming to the kind of tentative conclusion Prentis reaches in *Shuttlecock*. Willy Chapman achieves a release through death,

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and Prentis finds solace in ambiguity. As is suggested by the fact that *Waterland* ends not with a resolution in the fictional present but with Dick's suicide some four decades earlier, Thomas Crick finds ambiguity but no resting place. *The Sweet-Shop Owner* and *Shuttlecock* are well-made novels, works of art in which all aspects of the craft of fiction combine to create a satisfying whole; the excellence of *Waterland* is excellence of the type of Joyce's *Ulysses* or Lawrence's *The Rainbow*: the novel confronts crucial human concerns in ways that evoke their complexity and throw them into intense emotional relief at the same time as it satisfies our desire for good stories. Graham Swift is a writer who has achieved artistic maturity but shows every sign of further growth in his efforts to contribute to the work of "reclaiming the land."

[1] The importance of history as a theme in *Waterland* is established explicitly in its epigraph, which I will discuss later. Its significance for Swift's earlier novels was briefly noted by several reviewers, especially Alan Hollinghurst in "Of Time and the River," rev. of *Waterland*, *TLS* (17 October 1983), p. 1073; John Brewer and Stella Tillyard in "History and Telling Stories: Graham Swift's 'Waterland,'" *History Today*, 35 (January 1985), p. 49; and Michael Gorra in "When Life Closes In," rev. of *Learning to Swim* and *The Sweet-Shop Owner*, *New York Times Book Review* (23 June 1985), p. 11.

[2] Graham Swift, *The Sweet-Shop Owner* (1980; New York: Washington Square Press, 1985), p. 45. Subsequent references appear parenthetically in the text, cited as *SSO*.

[3] Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier* (1915; New York: Vintage, n.d.), p. 253.

[4] Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock* (1981; New York: Washington Square Press, 1985), pp. 70–71. Subsequent references appear parenthetically in the text, cited as *S*.

[5] Graham Swift, *Waterland* (1983; New York: Washington Square Press, 1985), pp. 6–7. Subsequent references appear parenthetically in the text, cited as *W*.

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The Encounter in Joyce's "An Encounter"

James P. Degnan

Just as Ernest Jones used ancient and Renaissance works like *Oedipus* and *Hamlet* to validate the twentieth-century insights of Sigmund Freud, so also might Jones have used James Joyce's brilliant little short story, "An Encounter." For "An Encounter," although it was written before Joyce read Freud,[1] is, in its subtlest images, gestures, and speeches, perhaps Joyce's most thoroughly Freudian work.

The story of two ostensibly ordinary young boys playing hooky from grade school, "An Encounter" ends with its young narrator-protagonist rather surprisingly confessing that he has always "despised . . . a little" his hooky-playing pal, Mahony. Answering the question why the narrator so despises Mahony becomes the key critical task to understanding the story and to appreciating its Freudian essence.

That a reasonably sensitive, intelligent, and imaginative person such as the narrator would naturally "despise . . . a little" the rather callous, crude, and cruel Mahony—who bullies smaller children, is cruel to animals, and is rude to older people—is certainly part of the answer. However, Joyce's story suggests a considerably more complex and universal answer: that the narrator's despising Mahony a "little" is an unconscious, symbolic confession of the age-old antipathy (an antipathy deriving from a mixture of repulsion and attraction, of contempt and envy) that the man of thought feels for the man of action; the man of imagination for the man of "common sense"; the man of conscience for the man of instinct; the civilized man for the primitive man. Thus, in "An Encounter," the major conflict is between the values represented by the narrator and those represented by Mahony, and, at its essence, the

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story is a dramatization of the complex struggle in human nature between super ego and id.

Although there are a few hints of an overt conflict between the two boys—the narrator's mild protest against Mahony's bullying the smaller children, for instance—essentially the struggle mentioned above takes place in the consciousness of the narrator-protagonist. Within the person of the narrator, the reader sees, throughout the story, a struggle the narrator himself is never clearly aware of: the struggle between the narrator's values (those of the super ego) and Mahony's (those of the id).

A beautifully subtle Joycean metaphor for dramatizing this struggle occurs early in the story when the narrator thinks of himself as a "reluctant Indian," thereby describing his attitude toward the "Wild West" games played at a friend's house, games the narrator calls "remote from my nature." Mahony, though, slightly later at the beginning of the story's hooky-playing adventure, is described as enthusiastically adopting the role of "the Indian"; that is, as *instinctively* becoming the natural, amoral, asocial man, the primitive, the savage. Instinctively, for example, Mahony pockets Leo Dillon's sixpence, intimidates the smaller children, looks for birds to shoot with his slingshot, chases the cat, calls Father Butler—symbol of church, school, tradition (super ego)—"Old Bunser," and is rude to the old pervert. None of this bothers Mahony's "conscience"; none of this causes him a moment's "reflection"; he simply behaves this way naturally and effortlessly.

On the other hand, the narrator, the "reluctant Indian," cannot instinctively and naturally enjoy the hooky-playing adventure: he is too intelligent and too imaginative. Notice how often he "reflects," "imagines," "pretends"; notice also that he regards the hooky session as a "plot," as something usually associated with the imaginary world of literature. The narrator cannot think or behave like Mahony because the narrator is too sensitive to other people's rights and feelings; he is too conscientious, too civilized, too bound to the demands of the super ego. The narrator wonders, for example, why Mahony brings along the slingshot, a symbol of the aggressiveness Mahony possesses and the narrator lacks. The narrator is conscientiously "puzzled" about the "right thing" to do with Leo's money; he finds Mahony's "free" use of slang worthy of commenting on; he conscientiously reminds Mahony that it is not fair to bully the smaller children; and, finally, he worries about hurting the feelings of the old pervert.

What Joyce is brilliantly articulating with this metaphor, the

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"Indian" metaphor, is not only the narrator's central problem and the major problem of the story, but, certainly according to Freud, the central problem of civilized man. In order to be civilized, man must check, must repress, his natural impulses, his appetites, his instincts and aggressive tendencies, his selfish "Indian" nature. And, in so doing, in trying, for example, to live by conscience, by codes and laws and ideals, by conventions and traditions and institutions and commandments, by the decrees of the super ego, civilized man, like the narrator-protagonist, is frustrated and runs the risk of neurosis, emotional paralysis (the inability to function caused by perfectionism and scrupulosity) and of perverting his nature.

The conflict between what Mahony represents and what the narrator represents, the conflict between id and super ego, resolves itself in the final scene of the story, the major recognition scene in the story. Here the narrator, explicitly for the first time, confesses his real feeling for Mahony—that is, his dependence on the strengths Mahony represents. In this scene Mahony brings "aid" to the narrator, and the narrator, in his characteristically conscientious way, feels "penitent" or guilty for having "always despised him (Mahony) a little." The "aid" Mahony brings, of course, is the aid the "enthusiastic Indian" can bring to the "reluctant Indian," that the man of action can bring to the man of thought, the man of instinct to the man of conscience, the id to the super ego—the aid to act, the aid to escape the spell of the pervert, a spell ironically made possible by the narrator's "superior" humanity, by his superior intellect and imagination and sense of decency.

On one level, the narrator's inability to break away easily from the pervert may be attributed to the narrator's sensitivity, to his good manners, to his unwillingness to hurt the old man's feelings by rudely taking leave. However, on a more significant level, the narrator's inability to break away may be attributed to his fascination with the pervert. The pervert, as suggested above, has *captured* the narrator's imagination. Whereas the old man with his literary pretensions and compulsive monologues simply bores Mahony—who commonsensically dismisses him as a "queer old josser" and then runs off in his characteristically natural way to chase a cat—the old man appeals strongly to the narrator's intellectual curiosity, something of which Mahony has little.

Besides being interested in and sympathetic toward the pervert, the narrator, Joyce suggests, actually identifies with the pervert. Both the narrator and the pervert, for example, are described as "bookworms" in contrast to Mahony, who the pervert says is "different; he goes in for

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games." (Here again Joyce suggests the mind–body, super ego–id conflict that informs the story.) From the narrator's point of view, the pervert is "well spoken" and "well read," though the pervert's taste in literature, in keeping with his character, is apparently for a kind of decadent romanticism; and the narrator immediately hopes that the old man will think well of him, that the old man will not think him as "stupid as Mahony."

Perversion, according to Freud, is a sickness of civilization, a sickness caused by over-civilization, by the development of the mind, imagination, and conscience at the expense of the "natural," the instinctive life. The pervert in "An Encounter" functions as a symbol of this over-civilization—as a symbol of decadence. That the narrator-protagonist "encounters" the pervert, momentarily finds himself in league with the pervert—he and the pervert become men of breeding and intelligence pitted against the "stupid" barbarian, the primitive Mahony—and, ultimately, needs Mahony's "aid" to escape the spell of the pervert, is Joyce's method of dramatizing through symbolic action the central conflict in the narrator's mind and the central and universal problem of civilized man.

If we ask ourselves what "happens" in "An Encounter," at least on this level of the story's action, we can answer that as a result of the encounter, the boy becomes to some extent conscious of the irony that his virtues—sensitivity, intelligence, conscientiousness, and imagination—have in them the seeds of the vices the old man embodies; that, in short, he (the narrator) could become what the old man is. The narrator's reluctant acknowledgment of his "need" for Mahony thus becomes, symbolically, Joyce's way of dramatizing the truth that if the narrator (and all civilized men) is to achieve genuine maturity, reality, identity, he must master the art of balancing the conflicting demands of his nature, the demands of the super ego and the id.

In terms of symbolic action it is interesting to note that during his dialogue (his encounter) with the pervert, the narrator assumes a "false identity," a false name. He has been, once again, "imaginative and intelligent" enough to lie to the old man that he is "Smith" and Mahony is "Murphy." Thus the "aid" that Mahony brings the narrator is the aid that restores the narrator to reality, to his real name (his identity) and self, the aid that saves the narrator from his false name and from the unreality of the pervert. Once again Joyce dramatizes the psychic risks the civilized man runs: because he is intelligent and imaginative, civilized man has the capacity to lie, to falsify, to pervert reality; thus

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civilized man's virtues, ironically, can function as vices to destroy him, to pervert his nature.

[1] Richard Ellmann, in *The Complete James Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), provides evidence (p. 54) indicating that Joyce, at the earliest, did not read Freud until some time between 1911 and 1914.

"An Encounter," according to the *Portable James Joyce* (New York: Viking, rev. ed. 1966), was written circa 1905 and accepted for publication, along with the other stories in *Dubliners*, in 1906.

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"Oh, What a Something Web We Weave": The Novels of Elizabeth Taylor

Jane Brown Gillette

Elizabeth Taylor (1912–1975) is not generally thought of as a writer concerned with philosophical issues. Her twelve books about life in suburban England are usually called "genteel" novels of manners and praised for "meticulous craftsmanship."[1] And yet Taylor judges her characters less by their social interactions than by their ability to perceive "ultimate truths" about the nature of "reality." Even though this reality includes the drawing room, its ultimate truths are ugliness, violence, loneliness, and death, a reality stark by anyone's standards and difficult to accept. Hence, much of Taylor's work concerns how people deceive themselves and others as they fall into and promote illusion.

Taylor's novels are peopled with writers and painters, her pages, peppered with allusions to works of art and artists. And yet the artistic imagination is only one manifestation of what Taylor sees as the human propensity for illusion. I optimistically label this propensity the "creative imagination"; in Taylor's work it is not the sole property of the artist, but, rather, a common human trait that frequently finds its paradigm in the more specific creativity of the artist.

Taylor's work is not unrelated to the novel of manners; the main difference between Taylor's "good" and "bad" characters—whether artists or not—is that her less sympathetic characters only use their imaginations to aggrandize and protect their egos, while her more sympathetic characters, although equally isolated, express through their illusions a solidarity with other lonely people. This essay will argue that Taylor's attitude toward the creative imagination changes from dark

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suspicion to hopeful celebration when she realizes its strange social dimensions; characters in earlier works only come to grief through their addiction to illusion; characters in later works tend to achieve a certain admirable success through their ability to create and promote illusions. Thus Taylor weaves together philosophy and drawing-room observation to create novels that are more than merely "genteel."

Taylor's work may be divided into three stages. In the early period, she is unfailingly critical of the distorting blandishments of the imagination: *At Mrs. Lippincote's* (1945), *Palladian* (1946), *A View of the Harbour* (1947), and *A Wreath of Roses* (1949). In her middle period, Taylor moderates her criticism: *A Game of Hide and Seek* (1951), *The Sleeping Beauty* (1953), and *Angel* (1957). Finally, the novels of her later years celebrate the creative imagination: *In a Summer Season* (1961), *The Soul of Kindness* (1964), *The Wedding Group* (1968), *Mrs. Palfrey at the Claremont* (1971), and *Blaming* (published posthumously in 1976). I shall concentrate on one from each period that clearly focuses on the paradigm of artistic creation: *A View of the Harbour, Angel,* and *Mrs. Palfrey at the Claremont.*

This schematic presentation of Taylor's shifting attitude is perhaps more useful for assessing her work than strictly accurate as a description, because in all her novels—early, middle, and late—she struggles with two major paradoxes: the novelist's use of "fiction" to unmask "illusion" and depict the "real," and the solitary novelist's condemnation of egotistic isolation. Much of Taylor's justly praised craftsmanship may be seen as an exploration of this first paradox; her abundant allusions, spare prose style, and preference for inconclusive closure are formal ways of confronting the problem of telling the truth with lies. Her subject matter, meanwhile, explores the common isolation of humanity.

Until more biographical information is published, one can only speculate about the reason for Taylor's change of attitude, but the amelioration that this essay professes to trace may well be one natural result of Taylor's successfully writing twelve novels. A novelist can certainly write one book without wondering if fiction strictly tells the truth, just as a solitary writer can be unaware of an audience—for a time—but not for novel after novel after novel. At some point, the novelist must decide that fiction reveals the truth and that writing, even though a solitary necessity, becomes a social activity when the novel is read. Taylor's seventh book *Angel,* a novel about an egomaniacal romance writer, marks this change in her attitude toward the creative imagination.

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The frequent allusions to famous works of literature in Taylor's early novels (1945–1949) may deceive the unwary into believing that she celebrates a continuum between the creative imaginations of the past and those of her own characters. What emerges, however, is that most of these allusions are ironically symptomatic of the delusion of the characters who employ them. Although *Hamlet* (specifically Ophelia) and *The Aeneid* get their due, the major references are to the great English women novelists from Austen to Woolf. As Taylor creates limited characters through this ironic contrast, she also indicts the imagination itself: the great English women novelists created a world of illusion, which it is the greatest folly to accept as "real."

For example, in *At Mrs. Lippincote's* (1945), Julia Davenant's whimsical fantasies about Heathcliff and Rochester lead her into a mild flirtation with her husband's commanding officer, Mallory. But imagining Mallory as a Brontë hero ignores the facts: Mallory in real life is merely an unromantic dentist and, despite his good will, is utterly incapable of saving Julia's marriage. Her husband is unfaithful to her, and family life in the modern world a sad comedown from that formerly lived in Mrs. Lippincote's solid Victorian house. Taylor emphasizes the theme of this novel in two subplots: Julia's son chooses books over childhood; her sister-in-law Eleanor flirts with both small-town Marxism and a weak young man, who romantically confesses he has only months to live, then lives prosaically on. Imagination in *At Mrs. Lippincote's* proves universally more appealing than reality.

Palladian offers grim evidence that the imagination can lead to disaster. Poor Cassandra, the heroine, must seek employment as a governess because her father has died, leaving her nothing but 2000 books. Not surprisingly, she sees her employer, Marion Vanbrugh, as Mr. Rochester, herself as Jane. Ironically lacking insight, Cassandra cannot see that Marion is both the weak master of a decaying house with a crumbling Palladian facade and a bookworm who himself confesses that he is "'*reading* myself to death.'"[2] Nor does Cassandra perceive that Marion is not the real father of Sophie, the little girl who holds the family together until she is crushed by a falling statue of Pomona.

The title of the novel refers not only to the facade of lies behind which the major characters live; it also suggests personal disaster for Cassandra by alluding to an episode in *The Aeneid*. Sinon tells the Trojans that the Greeks have left Troy because of Athena's anger at their attempted theft of the Palladium, a statue of Pallas Athena on which the safety of the city was supposed to depend. This lie persuades

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the Trojans to accept the horse within their walls. Unfortunately for the Trojans, Athena in truth becomes angry with the Greeks only after Ajax rapes her priestess Cassandra during the sack of Troy. In *Palladian,* the "rape" of Cassandra, rather than the presumed destruction of the household "goddess" Sophie, provides Taylor's final judgment on the imagination. When Cassandra marries Marion, she becomes the prisoner of her own imagination. Taylor ends the novel with a simple "lop-sided hen," not wise but free, who wanders across the terrace and when "the dark shadows of indoors fell coldly across it like a knife . . . turned and tottered back into the sunshine" (*P,* p. 192).

The contrast between thinking humans and "unthought" reality is the basis for one of Taylor's most accomplished novels, *A View of the Harbour* (1947). On the first pages of the novel, the fishermen going out to sea in a trawler look back at the harbor-side village and see the "sordid" become "picturesque."[3] On its last pages, the novel comes full circle when a yachtsman entering the harbor watches as "the view unclenched itself. . . . 'Nothing has changed,' Teddy Foyle thought" (*VH,* p. 299). And indeed the harbor itself is the same, its reality surviving the multitudinous "views" that people take of it.

The artist becomes virtually invisible in *A View of the Harbour* for the express purpose of telling us what a lie art is. Although Taylor makes few page-to-page allusions, the entire novel may be read as one major reference to Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse.* Taylor's flat, unlyrical, even—on occasion—antilyrical prose suggests that Woolf's style is a distortion of reality because it entangles every detail in the web of Woolf's sensibility. In contrast, Taylor's spare style pretends to leave each setting as well as each character free to speak for itself. In *To the Lighthouse,* Woolf's admiration for the artistic vision directs each character's gaze outward to the visionary symbol. In *A View of the Harbour,* Taylor stands, as it were, at the lighthouse and directs her gaze toward the benighted characters on the shore, who reveal the inadequacies of the creative imagination.

The novel focuses on an abortive love affair between Tory Foyle, a onetime summer resident, now divorced and living in the village year-round, and Dr. Robert Cazabon, who is married to her best friend and next-door neighbor, Beth, a novelist. In the end, Tory and Robert give each other up in order not to hurt Beth, and Tory becomes engaged to Bertram Hemingway, a retired sea captain and talentless painter, whom she does not love.

The pessimistic confirmation of loneliness inherent in this non-affair of the gentry is echoed in the lives of the working-class

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inhabitants of the other houses looking out on the harbor. A spiteful gossip, Mrs. Bracy is also a woman with a taste for life and a "great, ranging, wilful imagination" (*VH*, p. 12). Her confinement to bed and her one-windowed view make her life an image of isolation—and her death the ultimate loneliness: "No one could reach her, she knew, and in that knowledge lay all her helplessness and terror" (*VH*, p. 268). A few doors down lives Lily Wilson. Lonely and unhappy since her husband's death, she reads a lot: "In the spell of these words she sank deeply as if under an anesthetic, away from empty and makeshift reality" (*VH*, pp. 33–34).

Human lives on the harbor are as bleak as those of the fish that "twenty miles out at sea . . . fought and slithered in the nets, floundering and entangled" (*VH*, p. 196), for in their efforts to avoid loneliness, humans entangle themselves in the nets of their own imaginations. Mrs. Bracy is the most malignant, as well as the most pitiable. Her bedridden state makes her a limited "reader" of the scene: "'*That's* my book!' Mrs. Bracy would tell the curate, pointing out the window" (*VH*, p. 207), but the window, which aids in bringing on her fatal pneumonia, gives her only partial—hence warped—vision. She is "delighted to see Lily Wilson emerge from the houses walking with a French sailor," but, dropping the curtain in order to drink her cocoa, she does not see what actually happens. Innocent, Lily is nevertheless doomed to an even more bitter isolation when her reputation is ruined. Taylor indicates the exact nature of Mrs. Bracy's imaginative limitation when Mrs. Bracy "sees" an encounter between Robert and Tory: "Guilt she saw, treachery and deceit and self-indulgence. She did not see, as God might be expected to, their sensations of shame and horror" (*VH*, p. 208). God, of course, would have an unlimited view; "might be expected" is, however, the crucial phrase, for God, who might also be expected to set right Mrs. Bracy's mistakes, is only hypothetical. Taylor thus deepens the guilt of those who see reality partially, but ruin other lives completely.

The ex-sea-captain Bertram Hemingway would like to be considered a "'delightful painter of marine and *plage* subjects'" (*VH*, p. 7). "'An artist sees human nature differently—with different eyes,' he explained, feeling (which it was death to him not to feel) that he was a little out of the ruck of ordinary people" (*VH*, p. 135). In reality, he paints very little and meddles a lot. He first encourages Lily Wilson, then abandons her, and proposes a sexless union to Tory, who—desperate to stop being in the wrong—accepts. Even though Bertram asserts that "'what we reveal in our paintings is the soul of man, not a

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mere row of buildings'" (*VH*, p. 296), his own painting is fit only to hang in the bar parlor. As Tory says, "'It is very good. Very like. There is only one thing—it is quite obvious *where* it is, but not what time of day'" (*VH*, p. 288).

The industrious novelist, Beth Cazabon, neglects not only her husband and her children, but reality as well. For example, she is so obsessed by her dream of a funeral that she is hampered in her fictional creation of one; her dream is all the more powerful, her fictional difficulties all the greater, because she has never been to a real funeral; nevertheless, she refuses to attend Mrs. Bracy's. In fact, Beth seldom leaves the house "and consequently saw things freshly when she did, as if with the eyes of one released from a prison or sickbed. This was useful to her as a novelist. Everyday things did not become dull" (*VH*, p. 59). Her mind itself is "a prison or sickbed." Not surprisingly, Beth is oblivious to the relationship of her best friend and her husband. Tory at first feels that her relationship with Robert is possible because she herself is "real," whereas Beth is a writer and, as such, a "ruined" person, invulnerable to pain:

> "Everywhere you go, all you see and do, you are working up into something unreal, something to go on paper. . . . When anything important happens you're stunned and thrown out for a while, and then you recover—God, how novelists recover!—and you begin to wonder how you can make use of it, with a little shifting here, and a little adding there." (*VH*, p. 74)

Tory fears that Beth will not recover from *her* treachery and so rescues Beth's happiness at the expense of her own. Contrary to Bertram's belief, the ordinary person sees and feels more than the artist.

Beth's redeeming feature—a considerable one in Taylor's scheme of things—is that she recognizes the limitations of her books and sees their value as extending only to her own pleasure in writing them, an attitude that, however, intensifies her useless isolation: "'And even if I were one of the great ones, who, in the long run, cares? People walk about the streets and it is all the same to them if the novels of Henry James were never written'" (*VH*, p. 103). When she finishes her novel, she thinks, not of a possible reader, but of her own privacy:

> "This is the only moment and the whole reward. The ends of the circle are brought together and tied, and in the tying of the knot is perfect bliss, a second only before all the doubts and anxieties begin again and other people step in." (*VH*, p. 299)

The specious, if enjoyable, circle is completed, just as it is in *A View of the Harbour* itself: the trawler goes out, the yacht—and Tory's ex-

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husband—come in. The form claims enclosure and completion, but since Teddy's arrival promises a continuing action, the form is a lie.

In *A Wreath of Roses* (1949), Taylor shapes the theme—that pretty deceptions conceal the true horror of life—by her conviction that closure is one of the artist's most deceptive illusions—and the circle the perfect image of a lie. Two school friends, Liz and Camilla, pay their annual visit to Liz's former governess, Frances, now a painter. On the trip, Camilla witnesses a suicide. The main plot tells how she is deceived by a murderer (also a compulsive liar) who feels life is "real" only when he sees people die; he commits suicide at the end, bringing the novel full circle. This garish and conventional conclusion is, however, not a celebration of artistic form, for its meaning is drawn into question by the subplot.

At the time of the girls' visit, Frances is about to abandon painting and, by implication, commit suicide because she thinks that her pictures are expressions of mere sentimentality: " 'For was I not guilty of making ugliness charming? An English sadness like a veil over all I painted, until it became ladylike and nostalgic, governessy, utterly lacking in ferocity, brutality, violence.' "[4] She blames herself for stretching out a hand "to arrest the passing scene" (*WR*, p. 41), when she knows that " 'an honest painting would never be finished; an honest novel would stop in the middle of a sentence' " (*WR*, p. 213). No true work would have a pretty surface that claims to represent reality, any more than it would have a circular form that pretends to encompass life.

Frances does not kill herself at once; instead she attempts to find a new ferocious style, a venture discouraged by her main backer, Morland Beddoes. In the surfaces of Frances' "pretty pictures," Beddoes, a film director, has seen images of "reality" that he has later translated to the popular screen. At first, Beddoes seems to provide a strong dissenting voice in the novel, for he is by his own account enchanted by art. For example, he is afraid to meet Liz because he has admired Frances' painting of her and thinks Liz's reality might destroy the static charm of the artwork. It would be, he fears, as if the barmaid at the Folies-Bergère " 'lifted her hands from the marble and poured out a glass of Bass! All the mirrors would splinter' " (*WR*, p. 129). Beddoes' fear of life is, however, merely another, more graceful way of stating the inadequacy of art.

Frances herself squarely acknowledges that life is

> "darkness and the terrible things we do to one another and to ourselves. The sooner we are out of it the better. And paintings

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> don't matter. They are like making daisy-chains in the shadow of a volcano. Pathetic and childish." (*WR*, p. 163)

She does paint one more picture for Beddoes, "half a mirror with reflected hands lifting a wreath of roses, a flash of golden hair" (*WR*, p. 228). It is her farewell to painting, "'Ophelia handing out her flowers. . . . The last terrible gesture but one'" (*WR*, p. 228). Ironically, Frances resorts to artistic allusion to express her conviction of the uselessness of art—an irony not unlike Taylor's use of a circular ending in a novel about the lies of form. *A Wreath of Roses* is an unpleasant novel not only because it is dominated by Frances' simplistic rejection of art, but also because the novelist collaborates in the rejection.

Thus, early in her career, Taylor reached a low in her esteem for the artistic process, a difficult, if not impossible, attitude for one who nevertheless continued to write novels. It is not surprising, then, that in her next novel, *A Game of Hide and Seek* (1951), Taylor begins to entertain certain optimistic possibilities about the imagination—or, more precisely, she admits the negative implications of life without imagination. Harriet, the heroine, is too dim to understand many allusions (she does not know who Virginia Woolf is), but she knows she loves Vesey, who for all his cultural knowledge is too weak to win her. Although Vesey's weakness seems ultimately responsible for their unhappiness, *A Game of Hide and Seek* asks whether a little more imagination on Harriet's part might not have brought about a happy ending. Both characters succumb too easily to bleak reality.

Vinny Tumulty, the hero of *The Sleeping Beauty* (1953), at least puts up a fight when he becomes a bigamist, a double allegiance that is also symptomatic of Taylor's own increasingly divided mind. Vinny's story demonstrates that love is a necessary reinvention of the beloved, but Taylor herself seems uncertain whether this reinvention indeed changes the nature of a reality she goes out of her way to make remarkably grim; the implications of disbelief inherent in the allusion to the fairy tale gain strength from the very violence of the plot. For many years, Tumulty has been married to Rita, an affected dance instructor, who mistakenly announced herself pregnant after Vinny's only sexual encounter. His "inability to cross the gap from wooing to lovemaking" seems to be the result of "his romanticism, his longing for perfection."[5] Then he sees Emily and learns her terrible story. The face of the once beautiful Emily was disfigured in an automobile accident involving her sister's husband. As a result, Emily is virtually imprisoned by her sister, devoting her life to her retarded niece. Emily's face has been

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reconstructed, so that she is again beautiful—although she looks like a different person altogether. Her body remains badly scarred.

When Vinny liberates Emily from her sister and niece, Emily's reconstructed face allows him to make love to her scarred body. But has Vinny's reconstructive love similarly redeemed Emily's scarred personality? Is she really a different person? Taylor herself seems genuinely undecided whether Vinny's love is a fairy tale come true or a reinvented nightmare:

> The world cannot assimilate [love], or eject it. Its beauty can evoke evil: its radiance corrupts; and Vinny and Emily alone on the rocks, drinking their wine, feeling the sun touch their very bones, had bred, from their own bliss, fear, terror, indignation, shame, and hate. (*SB*, p. 149)

On the one hand, the invention of love creates suffering; on the other, the bliss is undeniable—as much triumph as tragedy.

The growing ambivalence expressed in these two novels reaches full development in *Angel* (1957), particularly in Taylor's ability to make us feel admiration as well as scorn for her heroine, a romantic novelist who is a paradigm of the best as well as the worst of the creative imagination. When Angel Deverell is fifteen, she writes an essay, "A Storm at Sea," which her teacher, Miss Dawson, mistakenly believes is plagiarized from Oscar Wilde or Walter Pater. We are given an example of Angel's flamboyant style in the very first words of the novel: "'into the vast vacuity of the empyrean.'" Miss Dawson asks Angel if she can tell what "empyrean" means, and Angel answers, "'It means "the highest heaven."'"[6] What we actually witness in these lines is the birth of the artist: as Satan is tossed out of heaven by God "into the vast vacuity," so Angel is tossed into the vacuum of writing romantic novels by the tedious quality of lower-middle-class life. Since Satan was a fallen angel, we must remind ourselves, on every page, that Angel's creative imagination is the agent of the divine as well as the satanic, Angel as well as Dev[er]ell. The satanic aspects of Angel's mind are more readily apparent. Writing about a funeral in her first novel, she apes God: "she mourned, not along with . . . the family, but from a different plane: God's perhaps" (*A*, p. 29). When she grows older, Angel is able to dispense with God altogether; her imagination becomes an enclosed, self-confirming mechanism. And yet Angel is ultimately angelic because, even though isolated in her pride, her imagination confirms human worth in general as it verifies her own in particular.

At the beginning of the novel, Taylor wisely portrays Angel from her own point of view, as if building up a store of sympathy that must

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last the reader a long, long time. Next Taylor helps the reader see Angel's good side by creating other characters who love her: her publisher Theo Gilbright, her companion Nora Howe-Nevinson, her chauffeur Marvell, and—for a time—her readers. Taylor finally makes Angel as artist representative of the human imagination. This familiar notion—tenable to most of us as long as the artist is, say, a lyric poet—becomes less easily accepted when the artist merely writes romance fiction. Taylor's major problem in *Angel* is to convince us that Angel resembles a serious artist enough to be a worthy paradigm, and to the degree that we are able to accept this claim, we find Angel's life admirable as well as pathetic, angelic as well as satanic.

Angel is always on the lookout for material. She takes incidents from real life and rearranges them into fiction; when a critic slights her, her third novel becomes the tale of one of those " 'who would sneer at Shakespeare because they could not write *Hamlet* themselves' " (*A*, p. 74). And she industriously transforms the real Paradise House, where her Aunt Lottie is a ladies' maid, into the fictional Paradise House that serves as backdrop for her romantic heroines: "That will do for Paradise House, was an obsessive formula which became a daily habit" (*A*, p. 15). Angel is also a serious craftsman. Her form always fits her content; for example, no matter how bad her prose, it is thoroughly appropriate to her topic. In writing her first novel, she imagines herself acting out daydreams, and the language is born simultaneously with the dreams: "Her garnets were a dark fire on her white skin. Then the old Queen did an unexpected, a gracious thing, which sent a murmur through those present. She leaned forward and kissed Angel's brow" (*A*, p. 27).

Angel's most important resemblance to a serious artist lies in her relationship to her readers; strictly speaking, she has none. As her husband Esmé points out, " 'the secret of your power over people is that you communicate with yourself, not your readers' " (*A*, p. 133). Angel and her readers need not communicate because their imaginations—equally isolated from reality—are already one; she shares and expresses their most cherished illusions—which, strange to say, contradict in their essence the isolated state of the individual: class relationships and love. Unexpected "gracious" things, garnets like dark fire, old Queens—these are what Angel's readers want: a glorious (even if unrealistic) vision of the upper classes. Similarly, the daughter of a widowed shopkeeper in a lower-class neighborhood, Angel is thoroughly—if not accurately—class conscious:

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> She would never write about the kind of life she had known when she was younger. She escaped from it to her dukes and duchesses, her foreign counts, her castles and moonlit terraces. . . . She wrote with ignorance and imagination. . . . (*A*, p. 76)

She ends her days in isolation, scorning her rich neighbors, scorned by her poor.

Angel's other popular theme is love. Everyone wants to be loved, and love is the only thing besides social prestige that Angel herself desires. Yet, even though Angel can readily depict romantic love, to the delight of her readers, the enclosed quality of her mind that keeps her from reality and is the source of her talent also keeps her from love itself. She can give and take affection from animals because they have no imaginations to threaten her own; they are, at once, themselves and what she wants them to be. But when Angel loves a real person, she grows susceptible to deceptions that resemble her own artistic manipulations.

Nora's brother, Esmé Howe-Nevinson, does not love Angel, although, down on his luck and knowing how she would create a love scene, he deceives her into believing he does. In the now-decayed Paradise House, he carves their initials on a cactus, then speaks his lines—which Angel could have written:

> "I mean that I love you. . . . I didn't intend to tell you, but I am told that women like the thought of hopeless love; the more the merrier, perhaps. A little trophy for you, something to hang on your bracelet—like this!" He took off his signet-ring, kissed it and put it into her hand. "When you are an old lady, you can show it to your grandchildren, and say 'That one was Esmé's—or was it Tom's, or Dick's, or Harry's?' " (*A*, p. 151)

Nature obligingly produces a romantic nineteenth-century thunderstorm, and Angel falls victim to her own imagination.

Esmé cannot sustain this performance, and nothing about the real Esmé is up to Angel's idea of him; on her honeymoon, she is disappointed by sex as well as Greece. Angel is, however, able to re-create an Esmé she can love, an imaginative act that unfortunately turns the real Esmé into a nonentity. The years bring even harsher realities for Angel's imagination to transform: the financial drain of buying and maintaining Paradise House; World War I, in which Esmé loses a leg; Esmé's subsequent boredom, gambling, and suicide. Bravely forging ahead, Angel writes to pay off Esmé's gambling debts and then enshrines him in her memory. Meanwhile her novels are out of print;

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readers now have needs different from Angel's, and she is incapable of adapting her dreams to theirs.

Nevertheless, Angel's later years prove the worth of the creative imagination. Uncontradicted by reality, Angel has always taken her chief pleasure in writing fiction. So intense is her self-enclosure that, hyperventilating, she all but suffocates on her own divine afflatus: "'I think I breathe badly when I am writing—hold my breath and let it come in gasps. . . . It is all right if I can belch'" (*A*, p. 134). When she finishes each novel, she wakes to an empty, lonely world, but in her old age, Angel never wakes from her dreams; nor need she write them down to be encompassed by them. To help us understand this, Taylor introduces a new character, the chauffeur Marvell. At first Esmé's attendant, in the next twenty-five years he becomes devoted to Angel. As an allusion to Andrew Marvell's "The Garden," Marvell's cantankerous presence confirms the worth of Angel's isolated imagination, which "withdraws into its happiness":

> The mind, that ocean where each kind
> Does straight its own resemblance find;
> Yet it creates, transcending these,
> Far other worlds and other seas,
> Annihilating all that's made
> To a green thought in a green shade.
> (lines 43–48)

Shabby, decaying Paradise House is no garden, but Marvell—"certainly no gardener" (*A*, p. 173)—loves Angel for the very strength of her self-confirming delusions. Left to itself, beyond the desire for social prestige and sexual love, the imagination absorbs reality at last.

Angel is also seen sympathetically through the eyes of Clive Fennelly, an art critic who is doing a piece on Esmé. Fennelly boosts the value of Angel's imagination by his claim that Esmé was an "unknown minor painter of erratic talent" whose "discoveries were limited" (*A*, pp. 208–09, 240). This judgment comes as a surprise because throughout the novel we have been led to believe that Esmé is as good an artist as Angel is a bad one *because* of his devotion to reality: "'barmaids and jockeys, barges in the fog, back streets in the pouring rain, slag heaps . . . the seamy side of life'" (*A*, p. 89). We have placed particular faith in his realistic depiction of Angel: "at the time people thought the portrait dreary and tactless and wondered why Esmé had not the wit to modify the arch of her nose, the eccentricity of her clothes and correct her slight astigmatism" (*A*, p. 138). Now Clive admires its "'wonderful economy in colour and composition'" and adds this surprising thought:

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"'And in portrait-painting something a little extra is asked for. The work cannot be judged quite from the usual standards; for the point is that there must be some likeness—the imagination is fettered'" (*A*, p. 204). Fennelly suggests that Esmé's very devotion to reality—his "fettered" imagination—kept his discoveries limited. Angel in her overgrown garden gains stature by her very disassociation from reality.

Above all, we come to admire Angel's imagination because of its specific creations, especially her love for Esmé, a masterpiece of self-delusion. When she discovers a love letter that proves his adultery, she is able—with ample help from Nora and Theo—to re-create the myth of Esmé's love for and fidelity to her. Angel also defies her poverty by similar means. When she is forced to sell her emerald ring, she thinks, "'At least I had it once, and that is so much better than never having had it at all'" (*A*, p. 218). With similar defiance, she proudly gives her last sixty pounds to Lady Baines's favorite charity, after Lady Baines unwisely offers her money (*A*, p. 236). Still, Angel's most triumphant defiance is of the perfectly realistic notion that life does not count, and for this delusion of the self-enclosed imagination we should all be grateful.

Dying of pneumonia, Angel forgets who she is: "she was lost, isolated, without identity. . . . Then to Angel it seemed that she was not so much dead as back at the very beginning. It is to be done all over again, she thought." She feels panic, but when Nora sponges her forehead and reminds her that she is at Paradise House:

> Angel was overwhelmed with relief. She realized that it was not to be gone through again; after all she was at home, in her own bed, with her life behind her. "I am Angel Deverell," she said and the words were very loud and triumphant and echoed round the room. Nora heard nothing for nothing had been said. (*A*, p. 249)

Angel thus confirms her ambiguous nature—Angel as well as Devil. She needs no God, for she has proudly created herself by her writing, and at the end of her life she experiences the same sense of exhausted accomplishment that she feels when she finishes a book. No longer merely self-enclosed and deluding, the creative imagination is ready to take its place in Taylor's later work as the creator of the valid self.

If Taylor only wrote about self-confident characters, this validation of the creative imagination would be as dreary as a self-help book. Her later novels (1961–1976) are, however, populated by a cast who seem indicative of England in decline; to echo Yeats, the imaginative lack all conviction, while the stupid are full of passionate intensity. For

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example, the sympathetic lovers of *In a Summer Season* (1961) fail from a lack of conviction. Kate, a rich, conventional, suburban widow, marries Dermot, charming, feckless, and a good ten years her junior. Everyone assumes that Dermot has married Kate for her money, although really he is in love with her, and she with him, a love strongly and convincingly sexual. Away together on a trip, they are happy: "Removed from their watchful audience—the chorus waiting to comment on and explain their downfall—their love stood a better chance."[7] Unfortunately they are seldom alone. Kate feels guilty, while Dermot, unable to find any work by which he can establish himself as the man of the house, becomes ill-tempered and turns to drink and deceit. An affair leads to his death.

Sympathetic as they are, Kate and Dermot are unable to make something socially substantial out of love. A similar failure of imagination permeates the lives of the other characters. Mrs. Meacock, the housekeeper, can make nothing sensible of her intended anthology of other people's anecdotes, "Five Thousand and One Witty and Humourous Sayings." She plods on, though, knowing that if one questions one's project "'one ends up wondering what was the use of writing *War and Peace*'" (*ISS*, p. 171). Although Dermot's mother Edwina sells old junk, she is incapable of transforming it into antique beauty as does Mrs. Gereth in *The Spoils of Poynton*, an allusion that runs—much to the embarrassing mystification of Dermot—throughout the book. The old virgins Aunt Ethel and her suffragette friend Gertrude discuss sex at length in their letters but can make no sense of it. Aunt Ethel imagines "Dermot and her niece engaged in the most complicated acrobatics. None the less, unlimited though the variety of its expressions might be, sex was something which must—and Gertrude agreed—wear itself out" (*ISS*, p. 54). Only Kate's teenage daughter Lou has the imagination—and the innocent confidence—necessary to love the young curate Father Blizzard, who is deserting to Rome, weary of dealing with people who cannot "'see God for the jumble'" (*ISS*, p. 231).

In Taylor's later novels, the last of which she wrote during her final illness, the value of imagination is enhanced by the contrasting evil of stupidity. In *The Soul of Kindness* (1964), Flora Secretan is a monster of selfish stupidity who sees herself as truly interested in others; Liz Corbett, a dedicated painter, is the only creature who dares dispel this illusion—via an anonymous letter that gives Flora "'a glimpse of herself as someone she could never bear to live with.'"[8] In *The Wedding Group* (1968), Harry Bretton, an artist of minor talent who paints Bible stories

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in modern dress and is jealous of Francis Bacon and Picasso, dominates his family and forces them to live in Quayne, an artsy-craftsy community that is carefully isolated from the rest of the world. Cressy, his granddaughter, breaks away, only to fall under the domination of her scheming mother-in-law Midge, who wants her son David to continue to live with her. Taylor, however, wastes little ambiguity in her portrayal of Harry and Midge; their imaginations are morally inferior because they meddle and lie in order to temper their own loneliness. In contrast, Taylor celebrates the vision of Cressy and David, who contradict the sentimental Wedgwood piece of the title by creating their own lives out of the disposable junkyard of contemporary England:

> They found a table which had just been wiped down, its sauce bottles re-grouped, and its ash-tray emptied.
>
> The noise was deafening.
>
> "*Our* place," Cressy said, smiling across the table at him. "Our little secret hide-out."[9]

Similarly, Taylor's last novel *Blaming* (1975) straightforwardly condemns Amy's self-centered lack of imagination, in contrast to the intelligent sympathy of Martha, an American novelist whose writing is as spare "as if translated from the French."[10] In this, her prose resembles Taylor's in these last novels, a prose that in *Mrs. Palfrey at the Claremont* (1971) brilliantly conveys the stark existences of a group of old people who cling to "emphatic respectability" in a London residential hotel.[11]

Mrs. Palfrey does not share in the self-delusion of the other residents. She knows that the "respectability" of the Claremont is as specious as the " 'Excellent Cuisine' " that it advertises and which Mrs. Palfrey takes "with a pinch of salt" (*MP*, p. 1). She does not pretend, as do the others, that the Claremont is home. Nevertheless, Mrs. Palfrey is sucked into a lie. Having admitted that she has a grandson living in London, she soon finds herself knitting him a sweater and, since he never comes to see her, inventing "illnesses for Desmond, and trips abroad connected with his work, which she knew quite well did not involve trips abroad. She found this a great strain" (*MP*, p. 18).

Lying, however, differs from self-delusion; in Mrs. Palfrey's case it is more akin to the good manners she never shies away from. As the wife of a foreign service officer in the East, she grew used to the concept of saving face by social lies, and it is in this spirit that she "apologizes" for Desmond. She engages in more adventurous lying when she meets Ludovic Myers, significantly by falling down in front of his window.

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Like Angel's tumble into the empyrean, Mrs. Palfrey's fall embarks her on a career in fiction.

Ludovic is an aspiring novelist, who immediately puts Mrs. Palfrey into a novel in a way that, for all his charm, seems rather cold-blooded. He too is lonely, and he does genuinely take to her, but his note-taking arouses our skepticism: " 'fluffy grey knickers . . . elastic . . . veins on leg colour of grapes . . . smell of lavender water (ugh!) . . . big spots on back of shiny hands and more veins—horizontal wrinkles across hands' " (*MP*, p. 29). Soon he has launched into a novel about life at the Claremont—*They Weren't Allowed to Die There*—which he has the decency to hope will be published only after Mrs. Palfrey's death. Taylor is not too hard on Ludo; he is, after all, merely what novelists tend to be. Nevertheless, it is clear—even to Ludo himself—that the creative imagination has found its true exemplar in Mrs. Palfrey. Always a lover of language (every night she memorizes lines from Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*), she now finds herself fluently passing off Ludo as her absent grandson Desmond, even while she apologizes to Ludo for involving him in a falsehood.

Like most of Taylor's sympathetic artists, Mrs. Palfrey has the grace to feel guilt for her creation: "When first we practice to deceive, she thought, oh, what a something web we weave" (*MP*, p. 120). And yet, her creation in the end is not a fictional grandson but a real relationship. Whatever the deceptive nature of creation in *Mrs. Palfrey at the Claremont*, the work of art tells the truth. Allusions are no longer ironic. Thus, Mrs. Arbuthnot snaps shut the latest novel by Lord Snow: " 'it seems to me he's going off' " (*MP*, p. 42). Ludo first reads George Gissing in the run-down urban laundromat, then—after his mother's lover has deserted her—washes his clothes to the pages of *Mme Bovary*. In a similar vein, Mrs. Palfrey creates truth out of lies by transforming the nature of her "fictional" relationship with Ludo and in so doing proves an absolute congruity between the creative imagination and moral worth.

This transformation occurs with another fall. Pursued by her unwelcome suitor Mr. Osmond, Mrs. Palfrey falls and breaks her hip. Her lie is revealed, or should be revealed. But when the real Desmond at last appears, Mrs. Palfrey's fiction is confirmed: no one at the Claremont believes he is really Desmond. And, in reality, although actually Desmond, he is not a true grandson, for his reaction to her broken hip is: "Grannie in hospital suited him admirably. A broken hip must delay nuptials, and he could now, and for the near future go on devoting himself to his writing" (*MP*, p. 195). It turns out that he has

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isolated himself from his grandmother because he too is writing a book on Cycladic art.

Ludo, however, rises to the occasion and proves the worth of the fictional relationship; he becomes—to others, to himself, to Mrs. Palfrey—the real grandson. When he hears of her fall, he feels dread—and remembers "the old Soviet film *Potemkin*—that sequence of the steps of Odessa; of the old lady, in particular, falling, with blood on her face, her spectacles smashed" (*MP*, p. 199). He immediately goes to see Mrs. Palfrey, comforts her, fulfills her request to get her a private room, her own nightgowns, and her poetry book, requests that her real grandson and daughter (who must attend a weekend house party) have no time to honor.

Pneumonia—the disease of the human afflatus that claimed Angel as well as Mrs. Bracy—sets in, and in spite of the comforts Ludo has provided ("'You've worked a miracle,' Mrs. Palfrey whispered") her condition worsens (*MP*, p. 203). She decides that she will change her will to favor Ludo instead of Desmond because she and Ludo have so much in common. At Mrs. Palfrey's deathbed, falsehood and truth, isolation and kinship merge in a scene of ultimate paradox. Unlike Angel, who only speaks to herself as she dies, Mrs. Palfrey talks with Ludo about her favorite poem—Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud"—which Ludo then recites, after a fashion, "with a few 'tra-las' to fill in what he had forgotten" (*MP*, p. 204). Significantly, the poem—which Taylor only alludes to and does not quote in the text—has to do with memory, the fusion of imagination and experience in the "inward eye" of the solitary poet:

> For oft, when on my couch I lie
> In vacant or in pensive mood,
> They flash upon that inward eye
> Which is the bliss of solitude;
> And then my heart with pleasure fills,
> And dances with the daffodils.
> (lines 19–24)

At Ludo's recitation, Mrs. Palfrey's own inward eye fuses creation with reality, as she confuses Ludo with Desmond:

> "Oh, I remember when you were a little boy. You used to hide behind those long red curtains and call 'Coo-ee,' but before I could look anywhere you'd say, 'I'm *here*, Grannie.' You never liked mysteries." (*MP*, p. 204)

This blissful memory of "finding" the self-revealed "Desmond" closes the "fictional" relationship between Mrs. Palfrey and Ludo. Her actual

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death, later that day, parallels and gives value to the one sure act of accomplishment available to the writer, the completion of a novel; Ludo finishes his book, and "having done so, he felt drained of all feeling, and tired, as if he had spewed up a whole world" (*MP*, p. 209). This conjunction completes the progression that began in Beth's and Angel's selfish creations: Ludo accomplishes his book just as Mrs. Palfrey accomplishes her life. Can we imagine that the nurse, in praising Mrs. Palfrey after her death, pronounces a similar benediction on the creative imagination? "'Always said, "thank you," even if she didn't at all like what she got'" (*MP*, p. 205).

A young man misquotes a poem to an old woman who mistakes him for her "lost" grandson, who misplays his game by revealing himself before he can be found: is Taylor's strongest characterization of the creative imagination that it produces error? Conceivably, but at least these errors are part of a useful fiction that soothes and lacks malice. Furthermore, even if illusion, this creation is no longer the solitary, self-enclosed business it was in the deathbed scenes of Mrs. Bracy and Angel. By the end of her career, then, Taylor certainly entertains an opinion of the creative imagination positive enough to keep her from Beth's despair: "'people walk about the streets and it is all the same to them if the novels of Henry James were never written'" (*VH*, p. 103). Mrs. Palfrey with her bedside copy of Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, Ludo with *Mme Bovary* at the laundromat, value the artistic products of the creative imagination as they lead their everyday lives.

If Taylor has not joined the ranks of such contemporaries as Barbara Pym, in whose work Christian faith is more likely than art to lead from the depicted world of clumsy human foolishness to an implied realm of divine grace, neither has she joined the ranks of such true believers in art as James himself. For Taylor, man's salvation lies in the realm of human imagination, yet unlike James, whose artists manqué suffer because they have the souls but not the skills of artists, Taylor extends the salvation of the imagination to the nonartist (Nora, Cressy), the bad artist (Angel), and even the false artist (Ludo)—who nevertheless has the wit to recognize the "true" artist in Mrs. Palfrey, who works in "life." In Taylor's hands, the creative imagination undergoes a democratization that is a fitting accomplishment for a writer who, despite her reputation as a genteel novelist of manners, was a professed Socialist living in a Socialist state.[12]

[1] Florence Leclercq, *Elizabeth Taylor* (Boston: Twayne, 1985), pp. 8–9. In

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addition to the novels cited below, see *At Mrs. Lippincote's* (New York: Knopf, 1946) and *A Game of Hide and Seek* (New York: Virago, 1986).

[2] Elizabeth Taylor, *Palladian* (New York: Virago, 1985), p. 65. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *P*.

[3] Elizabeth Taylor, *A View of the Harbour* (New York: Virago, 1987), p. 5. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *VH*.

[4] Elizabeth Taylor, *A Wreath of Roses* (New York: Knopf, 1949), p. 42. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *WR*.

[5] Elizabeth Taylor, *The Sleeping Beauty* (New York: Virago, 1983), p. 69.

[6] Elizabeth Taylor, *Angel* (New York: Virago, 1984), p. 7. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *A*.

[7] Elizabeth Taylor, *In a Summer Season* (New York: Virago, 1983), p. 120. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *ISS*.

[8] Elizabeth Taylor, *The Soul of Kindness* (New York: Virago, 1983), p. 215.

[9] Elizabeth Taylor, *The Wedding Group* (New York: Virago, 1985), p. 228.

[10] Elizabeth Taylor, *Blaming* (New York: Viking, 1976), p. 47.

[11] Elizabeth Taylor, *Mrs. Palfrey at the Claremont* (New York: Virago, 1983), p. 2. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *MP*.

[12] I would like to thank Mary Fawcett, Lucy Maddox, and Victoria Pedrick for reading earlier versions of this essay.

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THE 1989 *TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE* PRIZE IN LITERARY CRITICISM

Mary P. Cheadle has won this year's *TCL* prize in literary criticism for her essay "The Vision of Light in Ezra Pound's *The Unwobbling Pivot*." Christopher Ricks, distinguished critic and professor of English at Boston University, and most recently the author of *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice*, judged this year's entries. He writes:

> "My recommendation is that the prize be awarded for/to 'The Vision of Light in Ezra Pound's *The Unwobbling Pivot*'. What I particularly value in it is the balance or reconciliation of opposite virtues; it is precise without pedantry; committed without *parti pris*; informative without lumber; and *newly* informed (by careful and imaginative research) without ostentation. It has a central object of attention; has a purpose (and its eyes are bright with it); and has a manner at once sensitive and firm. It dissents with courtesy, and it never crows, either over Pound or over his commentators. It is an essay to return to, and I think *TCL* can be proud of having procured, and even perhaps prompted, it."

The *Twentieth Century Literature* Prize in Literary Criticism is awarded annually to the author (or authors) of work submitted to the journal during the preceding year which is judged to make the most impressive contribution to our understanding and appreciation of the literature of this century. Nominees are chosen by the editors of *TCL* and members of the journal's editorial board. A different prominent scholar and critic of modern literature serves each year as judge. The prize includes publication in our Summer issue and a total cash award of $500. All essays submitted to the journal are eligible.

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The Vision of Light in Ezra Pound's *The Unwobbling Pivot*

Winner of the 1989 TCL *Prize in Literary Criticism*

Mary P. Cheadle

Ezra Pound's translations of Confucius were composed during an extraordinarily tumultuous period, historical and personal, of his career: from the early 1940s when he was living in Italy and actively advocating Mussolini's fascism to the mid-1950s when, having been judged mentally unfit to stand trial in 1945 for treason against the United States, he was being held at St. Elizabeths hospital near Washington, D.C. These conditions make all the more remarkable the laconic orderliness of the ethical system described in the translations and the poise and equanimity of Pound's voice as translator. Against the extremist vehemence of some of the Rome Radio broadcasts of the early 1940s, for example, the measured, unaggressive tone of the translations stands out in stark relief; it is not too much to conjecture that the work of translating Confucius provided a stability for Pound that his world would otherwise have lacked.

As "poised" as the Confucian translations are, however, they are not static. The "belief" in Confucianism that Pound declared in the early 1930s was forced by the events of the 1940s and early 1950s to undergo some significant changes, and these changes are disclosed in his translations.[1] In *The Unwobbling Pivot,* Pound's translation of the *Chung Yung* and the subject of this essay, Pound merges a totalitarian interpretation of Confucianism with a metaphysical, Neoplatonic vision of light, and he does so in order to disentangle his Confucianism from the fascism with which he had allied it. In order to understand the significance of the vision of light at the end of *The Unwobbling Pivot,*

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some discussion of the evolution of Pound's Confucianism, his idea of "totalitarianism," and his interest in Neoplatonism is crucial.

Early in his career, Pound defined Confucianism as an antitranscendental ethics: Confucius, he wrote in 1917, quoting Voltaire, was " 'the first man who did not receive a divine inspiration.' " What Pound admired most in Confucianism at this time and through the 1920s was its simultaneous respect for individuality and sense of social responsibility. Contrasted to Christianity in which "the whole sense of social order is absent," Pound wrote in the same essay, Confucianism "is a statesman's way of thinking. The thought is for the community." And contrasted to what he regarded as Christianity's missionary mentality, Confucianism's "constant emphasis is on the value of personality, on the outlines of personality, on the man's right to preserve the outlines of his personality, and of his duty not to interfere with the personalities of others."[2]

Incidents such as Pound's dismissal in 1908 from a teaching position in Crawfordsville, Indiana, for befriending an actress (sharing a meal with her in his apartment and, as the story has been pieced together, giving her a place to sleep) would have contributed to Pound's resentment of what he was still calling in 1927 the Christian penchant for "messing into other peoples' affairs. . . ."[3] As Michael Bernstein and James Breslin have further suggested, this concern of Pound's for the "outlines" or boundaries of individuality may have stemmed from a deeper, personal discomfort with the blurring of boundaries that he associated with female sexuality.[4] Whatever the impetus for Pound's emphasis on the importance of human variety, however, in the later 1910s and 1920s he found in Confucianism a similar emphasis on the concept of individual difference. Thus, Confucius teaches the world "good manners" in "Ur" Canto I (1917) by " 'starting with himself' ";[5] thus, also, the " 'each in his nature' " of the Confucian Canto XIII, first published in 1924.[6]

In the late 1930s, Pound no longer writes of Confucianism in terms of the primacy of individual personality but emphasizes instead, in *Guide to Kulchur* (1938) and "Mang Tsze (The Ethics of Mencius)" (1938), Confucius' "totalitarian instinct."[7] By "totalitarianism" Pound does not mean an exclusively political ideology for a "coordinated" society, to borrow a word from the "Note" to *The Great Digest* (1947), his translation of the Confucian classic, the *Ta Hsüeh*.[8] As Matthew Little has argued, Pound's use of the term "totalitarian," like that of the apologists of Italian fascism, was inclusive, embracing not only totalitarian politics but a broader, philosophical "awareness of and

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interest in totalities"[9]; it suggests a whole epistemology and sensibility, a way of thinking that takes into account "the totality of the facts."[10] Mythology, for instance, is totalitarian because "it tries to find an expression for reality without over-simplification, and without scission. . . ."[11] Similarly, Confucius' "thought is never something scaled off the surface of facts. It is root volition branching out, the ethical weight is present in every phrase."[12] "The Confucian is totalitarian" and offers an antidote to what Pound called " 'Greek splitting' " because "at no point does the Confucio-Mencian ethic or philosophy splinter and split away from organic nature. . . . The nature of things is good. The *way* is the process of nature, *one* . . . ."[13]

It was this kind of "totalitarianism" that led Pound to ally Confucianism and Mussolini's fascism. Though China under Chiang Kai-shek was abandoning her 2000-year-old tradition of Confucianism, Pound suggests in the Rome Radio broadcasts, that tradition might yet be sustained in the West: "Hitler and Mussolini repeat Confucius without realizing it," he claimed.[14] "Fascist doctrine had its origin in Confucius," the Italian author Romano Bilenchi recalls Pound as having said in late 1941 or early 1942, in one of the most sweeping of his many uncritical idealizations of fascism, "passed by way of Cavalcanti, Flaubert, the German ethnologist Leo Frobenius and Enrico Pea directly to Mussolini, Hitler, and Oswald Mosley."[15] Another indication of the alliance he saw between Confucianism and fascism is the fact that two posters he designed for the propagation of fascism in the early 1940s carried slogans from *The Unwobbling Pivot*: " 'The archer who misses the bullseye turns and seeks the cause of his failure in himself' " and, from the close of the *Pivot*, " 'The unmixed functions without end, in time and space without end.' "[16]

Given this Confucian-fascist alliance, it is very likely that one of the reasons Pound began serious work with the Chinese texts of the Confucian classics in the early 1940s was that he believed Confucianism would be of use to the fascists at a time when the viability of their movement was being tested in world war. Though Pound had published a translation of the Confucian classic the *Ta Hsüeh* in 1928, this early translation was based solely on a nineteenth-century French translation by Guillaume Pauthier.[17] Not until the mid-1930s did he begin to study a Chinese dictionary, and not until August 1937 did he begin to study the Chinese text of the Confucian classics alongside a nineteenth-century English translation, still considered the orthodox one, by James Legge.[18] One of the first fruits of these sinological labors was a translation of a very small selection of passages from the *Lun Yü (The*

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Analects) concerning government, economics, and the importance of learning, which Pound included as "Digest of the Analects" in *Guide to Kulchur* (1938). But this "Digest" and the other discussions of Chinese words in *Guide to Kulchur*, and in "Mang Tsze (The Ethics of Mencius)," also published in 1938, was only an expedient first effort in what became for Pound in the early 1940s a more rigorous commitment to translating whole Confucian texts.[19]

For these full-length translations, Pound relied on Pauthier's and Legge's translations as "cribs": guides for the sense of passages in general but also measures from which to diverge when he wanted greater specificity or clarity than he felt their handling of certain passages, phrases, or particular words offered. He also relied on a pictographic method of analyzing written Chinese words or characters, a method which the work of Western sinologists since the 1920s has shown to be wrong; Pound regarded written Chinese words as "ideograms," composed of pictures or symbols representing natural things and processes, rather than as a combination of such pictures or symbols ("significs") and "phonetic" elements whose principal function is to approximate the sound of the word rather than suggest its meaning. Pound learned this unorthodox method first from the notebooks of Ernest Fenollosa, out of which he produced in the mid and late 1910s *Cathay*, translations of fifteen Japanese Noh plays, and *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*; the early nineteenth-century Chinese-English dictionary by Robert Morrison, which Dorothy Pound had acquired in London in the early 1910s when she was studying Chinese, confirmed Pound's indoctrination into the pictographic method of interpreting Chinese characters.[20]

He did not receive Mathews' more orthodox dictionary until late 1946 or early 1947, too late to influence the work he did on the Confucian texts before the late 1940s.[21] Though Pound followed Pauthier and Legge (and, for *The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius*, his last Confucian translation, Bernhard Karlgren) for the sense of passages generally, his interpretation of individual Chinese words, which are often corroborated by Morrison's pictographically oriented definitions, led him to produce translations that are at certain critical junctures unique.

First was his Italian translation of the *Ta Hsüeh (The Great Digest)*. On January 29, 1942, over Rome Radio, he said he was "officially occupied with a new translation of the Ta S'eu {*Ta Hsüeh*] of Confucius"[22]—"officially," perhaps, not only in the sense of predominantly, but because he intended his translation as a sort of manual, a

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"blueprint for world order in the future" that might be useful to fascist officials, one that would begin with individual order and proceed to familial, social, and political order.[23] Later that year, this Italian translation of the *Ta Hsüeh* was published alongside the Chinese text, under the title *Confucio, Ta S'eu, Dai Gaku, Studio Integrale.*

But when Mussolini was deposed by the Fascist Grand Council in July 1943, arrested, and, despite his rescue by the Nazis and his reinstatement as a sort of figurehead of their Salò Republic around Lake Garda in the north of the country, largely disempowered, Pound's hopes for a Confucian revolution in the West must have been shaken. In this context, his Italian translation of the *Chung Yung* (*The Unwobbling Pivot*), published in February 1945 under the title *L'asse che non vacilla*, insofar as it was a book for fascist Italy, is no more than a wishful swan song for a dying cause. As weak as the book was, however, the allies recognized the double entendre of the word "l'asse" in the title (referring to an axis or pivot and to the Axis powers) and censored it, with the result that most copies of it were burned after the liberation of Italy in the spring of 1945.

The English translations of these two works, *The Great Digest* and *The Unwobbling Pivot*, were completed by Pound in the fall of that year at the Disciplinary Training Center near Pisa, where the Americans were holding him on charges of treason.[24] At the end of November he was transferred to Washington, D.C., and soon after was declared mentally unfit to stand trial. This decision has become the subject of renewed controversy, but it seems clear that Pound did undergo a psychological breakdown during the three weeks he spent in the "cage" at the D.T.C., one that necessitated his being transferred to the medical area where he was allowed to write.[25] "The Pisan Cantos," which he composed there, are an expression of the personal turmoil—emotional, intellectual, and moral—that Pound underwent at the end of the war and at the D.T.C. *The Great Digest* and *Unwobbling Pivot,* written out in the same notebooks as the "Pisan Cantos,"[26] also aided Pound's recovery, not just by returning to him his poetic voice and by providing a written outlet for his personal turmoil, but by helping him regain the sense of individual, familial, social, and political order that the collapse of fascism and his experiences at the D.T.C. had dismantled. In the case of *The Unwobbling Pivot* particularly, the process of how Pound came to grips with and made sense of recent events and experiences is revealed with some complexity.

In *The Unwobbling Pivot*, translated into Italian early in 1945 and into English later that year, the "totalitarianism" Pound had admired in

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Confucianism since the late 1930s is given full expression. The word itself occurs only in an early draft of the *Pivot* (regarding the "process of heaven and earth," Pound writes: "there is a uniform process, totalitarian"[27]), not in the finished translation. But the concept of "inclusivity" and "wholeness" is present in many passages. "Equity" and "self-discipline" are linked with earth or nature and the heavens (*The Unwobbling Pivot*, XX.5 and .7). The "five activities of high importance under heaven" are, in the familial and social vision of Confucian ethics, "the obligations between prince and minister; between father and son; between husband and wife; between elder and younger brothers; and between friends" (XX.8). A conceptualization of "totalitarianism" as integrity or wholeness is also underscored in many passages, such as this on the three Confucian virtues: "The three efficient virtues are: knowledge, humanity and energy; and they are to be united in practice, do not attempt to split them apart one from the other" (XX.8), or this passage on the process of becoming knowledgeable:

> Some are born with instinctive knowledge, others learn by study, others are stupid and learn with great difficulty but the scope of knowing is one, it does not matter how one knows, the cult of knowledge is one.
>
> Some proceed calmly setting themselves in harmony with the process [of nature, without doing violence to themselves], others behave well in the hope of profit, others forcing themselves against the grain, but the finished labor is one. (XX.9)

The metaphor of "splitting," familiar from "Mang Tsze (The Ethics of Mencius)," had been suggested to Pound by the nineteenth-century translations of Pauthier and Legge he was consulting; the word "split" itself occurs in Legge's translation of XII.2 (Pauthier's word is *diviser*), where its concrete, almost sculptural quality would have appealed to Pound. But the metaphor occurs more frequently in Pound's *Unwobbling Pivot* than it does in either Pauthier's or Legge's translations of the *Chung Yung*, not only in XII.2, where Pound reuses Legge's word "split," but in later passages: in XXVI.7, where "the celestial and earthly process" is "defined in a single phrase; its actions and its creations have no duality"; in XXV.3, where the process of "looking straight into oneself and thence acting" replaces Cartesian dualism not with complete monism but with a crossing-over of the gap between "outer and inner, object and subject"; and in XIV.2, where the Confucian gentleman or "man of breed" is defined in part as one who "can not be split in such a way as to be shut off and unable to rejoin himself."

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Essential to Pound's exemplary Confucian man is that he not consist of separable "parts," that he be one, whole, "total."

This emphasis on the "totalitarian" nature of Confucianism is one basis for Pound's comparison of Confucianism as he interpreted it and Neoplatonism, which also emphasizes, for example, the unity of "inner" and "outer" and the necessity of integrity versus duality.[28] Other points of intersection between Pound's interpretation of Confucianism and Neoplatonism are suggested in the closing lines of *The Unwobbling Pivot*:

> The *Book of Odes* says:
> *The decree of heaven*
> *takes the bird in its net.*
> *Fair as the grain white-bearded*
> *There is no end to its beauty.*
> The hidden meaning of these lines is:
> thus heaven is heaven [or this is the
> heavenly nature, co-involgent].
> *As silky light, King Wen's virtue*
> *Coming down with the sunlight,*
> *what purity!*
> *He looks in his heart*
> *And does.*
> —*Shi King,* IV, I, 2, I.
> Here the sense is: In this way was Wen
> perfect.
> The *unmixed* functions [in time and
> in space] without bourne.
> This unmixed is the tensile light, the
> Immaculata. There is no end
> to its action.

A number of terms in this passage may need identification and explanation. The *Book of Odes* is the "*Shi King,*" the *Shih Ching* or *Book of Poetry* (which Pound later translated as *The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius*). Some extremely pictographic interpretations of certain words in the Chinese text of one of the poems in the *Shih Ching* ("IV, I, 1, 2, I" refers to Part IV, Book One, poem two, the first half of stanza one, in the *Shih Ching*) result in such richly "imaginative" phrases in Pound's translation as: the "decree of heaven," taking "the bird in its net," "Fair as the grain white-bearded," the "silky light" of King Wen's virtue "coming down with the sunlight," and "He looks in his heart / and does" (a more specific translation of the important Confucian term 德 [*te*] than its more common rendering as "virtue"). The Latinate term "co-involgent" suggests the ubiquity of the Confucian heaven, the

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way it makes itself known not only in terms of itself but immanently in nature and in man; "tensile," from the Latin word for "to stretch," suggests something that extends from one thing to another as King Wen's virtue stretches out like sunlight between the sky and the earth, knitting his empire together with the processes of nature and heaven. More relevant to a discussion of the Neoplatonic overtones of this passage is another Latin term at the very end of this closing passage: "Immaculata," a word in the Catholic mass for that which is "unstained" or, in this passage, "*unmixed*" with matter, echoes certain passages in the *Enneads* as translated early in this century by Stephen Mackenna.[29]

But the most striking mark of the Neoplatonic influence in these closing lines is the imagery of light: the "silky light" of "King Wen's virtue / Coming down with the sunlight," the "whiteness" of the "white-bearded grain," and, most emphatically, the endless, "unmixed," "immaculate" "tensile light." One of the sources of this light is Pound's interpretation of the word 顯 (*hsien*), which occurs once in the Chinese text for this passage.[30] Legge and Pauthier also see some light in 顯 (*hsien*), which they translate as "illustrious" and "éclatante," buried metaphors when compared to Pound's strong, repeated images of light. But Morrison's early nineteenth-century dictionary, on which Pound was relying at the time, offers a definition of 顯 (*hsien*) that is more emphatically indicative of light: "Light; manifest; apparent; conspicuous; illustrious; to illustrate; to exhibit; manifestly apparent; divine glory."[31] Pound may even have seen a suggestion of light in 純 (*ch'un*), as well, a word that occurs twice in the passage. For again on the basis of Morrison, he later defined 示 (*shih*), similar to one of the elements in 純 (*ch'un*), as, "The light descending (from the sun, moon and stars)."[32] Clearly, Pound is exploiting pictographic suggestions of light in the Chinese text. He does so on the strength of his desire to accentuate a Confucian light philosophy that, as will be argued, he believed was comparable to Neoplatonism's.

Pound's interest in Neoplatonism began very early in his career; according to Leon Surette, Pound's interest in light philosophy had been born even by 1906.[33] The early and late Neoplatonists Porphyry, Proclus, Psellus, Ficino, and Heydon are included in the first three preliminary cantos of 1917, and Iamblichus, Plethon, and Plotinus in the first seventeen cantos of 1925. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, Pound's interest in Neoplatonism took on special vigor when he reimmersed himself in a poem he had first translated in 1910, Guido

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Cavalcanti's "Donna mi prega," this time focusing on the light philosophy he had come to believe was intrinsic to it.[34] Pound continued to pursue Neoplatonic (and Neopythagorean) light philosophy late in his career, alluding in the post-"Pisan cantos" to the pre-Plotinian philosophers Pythagoras, Apollonius, and Ocellus, and to the medieval theologians Richard St. Victor and St. Anselm.

No comprehensive study of Pound and Neoplatonism has been published, but tracing the evolution of Pound's interest in Erigena, for example, from its beginning in the late 1920s through "Rock-Drill" and "Thrones" in the 1950s, Walter B. Michaels has argued that while Pound was initially attracted by Erigena's ethics, this interest shifted during the late 1930s and 1940s to a new emphasis on Erigena's light philosophy.[35] The movement in Pound's interest in Erigena from his ethics to his metaphysics, especially to the metaphysics of light, corresponds precisely to the movement that occurred during the first half of the 1940s in Pound's Confucianism: having once emphasized an ethics of individuality and social responsibility, Pound now saw in Confucianism a philosophy of light as well.

The earliest evidence of Pound's interest in comparing a Confucian light philosophy with Neoplatonism is in "China canto" LV, written in 1938:

> Lux enim per se omnem in partem
> Reason from heaven, said Tcheou Tun-y
> enlighteneth all things
> seipsum seipsum diffundit, risplende
> (LV/298)

In this brief passage, the wisdom of a twelfth-century Neo-Confucian, Chou Tun-i, is juxtaposed to the combined wisdom of the thirteenth-century theologian Grosseteste and the Tuscan poet Cavalcanti, to the effect that light diffuses itself through itself, everywhere, resplendently. The first line is Pound's imperfect recollection of a line from Grosseteste's *De luce*: "Lux enim per se in omnem partem se ipsam diffundit. . . ."[36] "Risplende" is an allusion to Cavalcanti's "Donna mi prega," about whose light philosophy, as already mentioned, Pound had written in the early 1930s. And Chou Tun-i's "Reason enlighteneth all things," according to Walter Michaels, is a "subject rhyme" with Erigena's ideas about the authority of reason over custom and orthodoxy and the presence of light in all things.

In an essay written probably in the early 1940s, Pound outlines more explicitly the parameters of the comparison he was considering between Confucianism and Neoplatonism:

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> At bottom, or nearly at bottom, or near to the spiritual sphere, we have, it seems to me, a universe in sympathy (not to use stronger terms) with the thought of Scotus Erigena (without the eccentricity of Erigena), of Grosseteste, and of Albertus Magnus. A world of light; perhaps of the diaphanous, which fits with the spirit Guido Cavalcanti was immersed in before writing "Donna mi prega."
>
> Not to carry this analogy too far, beyond the idea of light, that is, we should not look in Confucian thought for resemblances to what are strictly European developments. I refer only to the concept of light; it does not lead to the magnificent dictum of Erigena "Omnia quae sunt, lumina sunt.["] The idea that Erigena himself weakened in his own explanation. Erigena, I should say, is to be considered a poet of true nature, a poet who wrote on theology, rather theology that lasted for posterity.
>
> Confucian life and thought turns in a world of light and flowing water.
>
> But it was a less quietist philosophy. And a philosophy appropriate to everyone entering state office, everyone going into party residence, to administer, to make public activities function, to lead the administration of a group [or possibly of the *amassi*, the grain storages established in fascist Italy], to manage a factory without irritations and useless frictions.[37]

The distinctions Pound draws in these paragraphs between Confucianism and medieval light philosophy are important: Confucianism is government-oriented, Pound says, medieval theology "quietistic"; Confucianism does not carry its vision of "light and flowing water" as far as Erigena does. And it is clear that at the time this essay was written, sometime before the end of World War II, Pound preferred Confucianism's politics to Erigena's Catholic quietism. By 1945, however, the year he translated the *Chung Yung* into Italian (*L'asse che non vacilla*) and into English (*The Unwobbling Pivot*), the distinctions between Confucianism and medieval Neoplatonism had become less important than the vision of light they shared. In an early draft of *The Unwobbling Pivot*, Pound writes, "Confucian metaphysics arises from light; students should compare it with scholasticism; with Grosseteste, or with the poetry of Guido Cavalcanti (in Donna mi prega)."[38] The end of the *Pivot* celebrates a vision of light that is both Confucian and Neoplatonic, a vision of light that descends figuratively and literally from the sun or sky, giving life, intelligence, divinity, to all that it enters.

Even more suggestive of a new transcendental turn in Pound's Confucianism than the light in these lines, however, are the closing phrases, "*no end to its beauty*," "the *unmixed* functions [in time and in

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space] without bourne," and "there is no end to its action." The bracketed interpolation, "[in space and in time]," signals an uneasiness on Pound's part with the metaphysical leaning of his translation at this point, so contrary was it to the emphasis he had been giving since the late 1910s to the antitranscendental, practical nature of Confucianism. But the limitlessness of those closing phrases connotes a transcendent realm distinctly not bound by time or space, history or distance. It is not that the passage is lacking entirely in a historical or human context: the vision of light results, after all, from the archetypal King Wen's virtue.

Similarly, earlier in the *Pivot*, a model of spirituality or soul more immanent than transcendent, more Ovidian than idealist in nature, has been suggested: "The spirits of the energies and the rays . . . are in the bones of all things and we can not expel them, they are inseparable . . ." (Chapter XVI). But just as the concept of immanence established in Chapter XVI is quietly replaced at the close of the *Pivot* by a more sublime, Neoplatonic idea of "unmixed"—"sublime" in that it sublimates the relative physicality or nearness of Ovidian divinity for an abstract idea of divinity—the historical and human context that the mention of King Wen provides lacks force in counteracting the tendency toward a transcendence of time and space in the very last lines: "The unmixed is the tensile light, the Immaculata. There is no end to its action."

In his "Note" introducing the *Pivot* Pound promises that, "The second of the Four Classics, Chung Yung, THE UNWOBBLING PIVOT, contains what is usually supposed not to exist, namely the Confucian metaphysics."[39] Underscoring his concern with the Confucian metaphysics, Pound ends his translation seven chapters before the end of the Chinese text, omitting discussions of the sincere man as sage and ruler that occur in those seven chapters of the Chinese. In a closing "Note," he states that the reason he has concluded his translation at this point is that the "millennial history of China" had borne out the Confucian "faith" set down in the *Chung Yung (The Unwobbling Pivot)*—that is, China's dynasties "rose on the Confucian idea" and fell into "decadence" when "the idea was not held to"; therefore, Pound explains, there is no need of "adjective" or further "comment."

There is a different reason, underlying this ostensible one, for Pound's abridgment of the *Chung Yung*: in 1945, with Mussolini defeated, executed, and "hung by his heels" in Milan, the chapters on the sage and the ruler at the end of the *Chung Yung* must have seemed almost tauntingly ironic to Pound, so far did the world seem from the

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ideal of leadership projected in those last chapters. Pound chose to end his translation seven chapters before the end of the Chinese text because he knew that Confucian ethics and politics had *not* been borne out in Italy, and he found some relief from that failure in the vision of light he saw in the words 顯 (*hsien*) and 純 (*ch'un*) in the Chinese text for Chapter XXVI. The claim of critics such as Hugh Kenner, Walter Michaels, and Sharon Mayer Liber that Pound "Neoplatonized" Confucianism, though not true for the Confucian translations that preceded or followed *The Unwobbling Pivot*, is certainly valid in respect to this consummate, closing vision.[40]

Most significant in understanding why Pound should have reinterpreted Confucianism as containing a metaphysics and, at the end of *The Unwobbling Pivot* specifically, a philosophy of light, is the defeat of the fascist movement finalized by the allied victory in the spring of 1945. If his "belief" in Confucianism were to survive that defeat, it was imperative for Pound to dissociate Confucianism from the fascism with which he had previously allied it. "Hitler and Mussolini were successful insofar as they followed Confucius," he said to a reporter in 1945 after the allied victory, qualifying his earlier statement about Hitler, Mussolini, and Mosley, Cavalcanti, Flaubert, Frobenius, and Enrico Pea as heirs of Confucius; "they failed because they did not follow him more closely."[41] What gave Pound's Confucianism a capacity to withstand the shocks of history that his previously politically and ethically oriented Confucianism lacked was the elision between Confucianism and Neoplatonism that he had begun to consider in the late 1930s. Specifically, Neoplatonism salvaged Pound's Confucianism from the political and historical morass into which the fate of fascism threatened to take it by enabling his Confucianism to transcend the very ends and limits that his earlier Confucianism had valued:

> The *unmixed* functions [in time and
> in space] without bourne.
> This unmixed is the tensile light, the
> Immaculata. There is no end
> to its action.

Pound turned to a sort of Confucio-Neoplatonic metaphysics in 1945, in effect, because his "dream" of a "paradiso terrestre" created by a Confucio-fascistic politics and ethics was being shattered.

To conclude *The Unwobbling Pivot* with a vision of light was for Pound a celebration of Confucianism: at once the metaphysical consummation of his belief in epistemological, philosophical, and

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political "totalitarianism," Confucian and fascist, and an unqualified conjoining of Confucianism and Neoplatonism. As a consummation of Pound's "totalitarianism," however, this vision held as little promise for the future as Mussolini's now defeated movement. Pound's fusion of a "totalitarian" Confucianism and Neoplatonism was a futile and short-lived measure, confined to the specific historical period of the late 1930s and early 1940s, and most of all to the moment of the composition of *The Unwobbling Pivot*. For a "world of light and flowing water," as Pound had described the Confucian world in his essay of the early 1940s, like the vision of "the tensile light, the / Immaculata," is unsupportable without the practical, individual, and political ethics upon which Confucianism is based. Pound realized this even in the "Pisan Cantos" where, amidst reminiscences, political and economic lessons, and apparitions of Ovidian presences, he begins to turn away from the imperial ideals of *The Great Digest* and *The Unwobbling Pivot,* back to some of the ethical fundamentals he had once admired in Confucianism: the importance of precise observances of natural processes, of "humanitas" (Pound's definition of 仁 [*jen*]), and of verbal precision:

> and for all that old Ford's conversation was better,
> consisting in *res* non *verba*,
> despite William's anecdotes, in that Fordie
> never dented an idea for a phrase's sake
> and had more humanitas 仁 jen
> (LXXXII/525)

Where the shattering of Pound's dream of Confucian "totalitarianism" and his return to the fundamentals of Confucian ethics is registered most emphatically, though, is in his subsequent translations of Confucius: *The Analects* (1950) and *The Classic Anthology Defined by Confucius* (1954). Turning away from the Confucian metaphysics that had interested him in the late 1930s and first half of the 1940s, he found in these last two translations doctrinal fragments that he believed might be helpful in rebuilding a sense of individual, economic, and political order for himself and for his students. *The Analects* do not have the "coherence or orderly sequence" that *The Great Digest* and *The Unwobbling Pivot* have, Pound writes in the introductory "Procedure" to this third translation: "they are the oddments which Kung's circle found indispensable. . . ." *The Classic Anthology,* too, is a collection of poems extremely diverse in form, voice, tone, and theme; in them even more than in *The Analects,* the social and historical situations of individual

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men and women play a much greater role than visions of totalitarian order such as those suggested in *The Great Digest* and *The Unwobbling Pivot*. *The Analects* and *The Classic Anthology* contain the Confucian truth in fragments; their light is splintered compared to the more magnificent, "coherent" light of the conclusion to *The Unwobbling Pivot*. But in their greater accessibility, variety, and complexity, Pound's last two Confucian translations present a more human, perhaps more humane, version of Confucianism than can be found in *The Unwobbling Pivot*, whose Neoplatonic vision of limitless light marks the demise of Pound's dream of totalitarian order.

[1] In 1930, responding to T. S. Eliot's question of 1928, "What does Mr. Pound believe?" Pound answered "read Ovid and Confucius" (William Cookson, ed., *Ezra Pound: Selected Prose 1909–1965* [New York: New Directions, 1973], "Credo," p. 53); in 1934, he answered again, more simply, "I believe the Ta Hio," the *Ta Hsüeh* or *Great Digest* of Confucius (Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* [Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1971], p. 447; and T. S. Eliot, ed., *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* [New York: New Directions, 1935], "Date Line," p. 447).

[2] Cookson, ed., *Ezra Pound: Selected Prose*, pp. 193–94 ("Provincialism the Enemy II," 1917).

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 216 ("Prolegomena," 1927). For accounts of the incident with the actress in Crawfordsville, see Noel Stock, *The Life of Ezra Pound* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1982), p. 41, and John Tytell, *Ezra Pound: The Solitary Volcano* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), pp. 33–34.

[4] Michael André Bernstein, "Image, Word, and Sign: The Visual Arts as Evidence," *Critical Inquiry*, 12, No. 2 (Winter 1985), 347–64; James E. B. Breslin, "Ezra Pound and the Jews," *San Jose Studies*, 13, No. 3 (Fall 1986), 37–45.

[5] Ezra Pound, "Three Cantos," *Poetry*, 10, No. 3 (June 1917), 119 (Canto II).

[6] Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1972), p. 58.

[7] Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 279.

[8] Ezra Pound, *Confucius, The Great Digest, The Unwobbling Pivot, The Analects* (New York: New Directions, 1951), p. 19. All subsequent quotations of Pound's translations of Confucius will be from this book unless otherwise indicated; they will be cited in the text by chapter rather than page number.

[9] Matthew Little, "Pound's Use of the Word 'Totalitarian,'" *Paideuma*, 11, No. 1 (Spring 1982), 156. The distinction Little implies between what Pound meant by "totalitarian" and a political "totalitarian," however, is false. For the Italian fascists, "politics" was to take on a new meaning, indicating something much more expansive and inclusive than the mere operations of government. In this sense Pound's "totalitarian," like the fascists' "totalitarian," is deeply political.

[10] Cookson, ed., *Ezra Pound: Selected Prose*, p. 186 ("The Jefferson-Adams Letters as a Shrine and a Monument," 1937–38).

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[11] *Ibid.*, p. 87 ("Mang Tsze [The Ethics of Mencius]," 1938).

[12] Pound, *Guide to Kulchur*, p. 279.

[13] Cookson, ed., *Ezra Pound: Selected Prose*, pp. 85 and 87 ("Mang Tsze [The Ethics of Mencius]," 1938).

[14] My translation of "Ripeto che Hitler and Mussolini ripetono Confuzio senza accorgersono," from an undated essay in typescript at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. I am grateful to the Beinecke for allowing me to study the extensive Pound material contained in its Collection of American Literature.

According to Donald Gallup, *Ezra Pound: A Bibliography* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985), an article by this title was published in *Meridiano di Roma* on May 11, 1942. Some of Pound's remarks on modern China are found in Leonard Doob, ed., *"Ezra Pound Speaking," Radio Speeches of World War II* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978), pp. 5, 214, 286–88.

[15] David Anderson, trans., Romano Bilenchi, "Rapallo, 1941," *Paideuma*, 8, No. 3 (Winter 1979), 435.

[16] Stock, *The Life of Ezra Pound*, p. 403.

[17] Guillaume Pauthier, *Confucius et Mencius: Les Quatre Livres de philosophie morale et politique de la Chine* (Paris: Charpentier, 1868).

[18] James Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Univ. Press, 1960) (rpt. of 1893–95 Oxford Univ. Press edition), Vol. I. For pieces of the story of Pound's intense study of the Chinese dictionary and the Confucian texts in the late 1930s, see James Laughlin, "Ez as Waz," *San Jose Studies*, 12, No. 3 (Fall 1986), 12; Kenner, *The Pound Era*, p. 250; and Cookson, ed., *Ezra Pound: Selected Prose*, p. 82.

[19] "Mang Tsze (The Ethics of Mencius)" is reprinted in Cookson, ed., *Ezra Pound: Selected Prose*, pp. 81–97.

[20] The Reverend Robert Morrison, *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language, in Three Parts* (Macao: Printed at the Honorable East India Company's Press by P. P. Thomas, 1815–1823); for how the Pounds acquired Morrison's dictionary, see Kenner, *The Pound Era*, p. 250.

[21] R. H. Mathews, *Mathews' Chinese-English Dictionary* (Shanghai: China Inland Mission and Presbyterian Mission Press, 1931, revised American edition, n.p., 1943); for how Pound acquired Mathews' dictionary, see my dissertation, "Ezra Pound's Confucian Translations" (Univ. of California, Berkeley, 1987), pp. 305–06.

[22] Doob, ed., *"Ezra Pound Speaking,"* p. 23.

[23] E. Fuller Torrey, *The Roots of Treason: Ezra Pound and the Secret of St. Elizabeths* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), p. 211, where Torrey writes that Dr. Muncie, one of the four psychiatrists who provided testimony regarding Pound's mental condition in late 1945, said that Pound had "a feeling that he had the key to the peace of the world through the writings of Confucius" and that his translations of Confucius provided a "blueprint for world order in the future."

[24] The dates October 5–November 5, 1945, for the completion of Pound's English translation of the *Ta Hsüeh* are given at the end of "The Great Digest" in Pound, *Confucius, The Great Digest, The Unwobbling Pivot, The Analects*. The date October 5, 1945, for the completion of *The Unwobbling Pivot* comes at the end of the typescript version at the Beinecke Library, Yale University.

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[25] For discussions of Pound's psychological state at the D.T.C. and just after, see Stock, *The Life of Ezra Pound,* pp. 408–09; Tytell, *Ezra Pound: The Solitary Volcano,* pp. 277–81; Laughlin, "Ez as Waz," pp. 21–22; Kenner, *The Pound Era,* pp. 462–63; Harry Meacham, *The Caged Panther: Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeths* (New York: Twayne, 1967), p. 29; and, opposing them, Torrey, *The Roots of Treason.*

[26] Kenner, *The Pound Era,* p. 474.

[27] Typescript of *The Unwobbling Pivot,* Beinecke Library, Yale University.

[28] See Grace H. Turnbull, comp., *The Essence of Plotinus* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1948), whose passages are based on Stephen Mackenna's translations of Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* and Plotinus' *Enneads*; see particularly the *Enneads,* 30.III.viii.6 / Turnbull, p. 112; 9.VI.ix.10 / p. 221; 47 or 48.III.ii.1 / p. 75; 22.VI.iv.3 / pp. 184–85; and 47 or 48.III.ii.1 / pp. 75–76. Other terms in Mackenna's translation of the *Enneads* as quoted by Turnbull are echoed in Pound's Confucian translations: "the grand learning," the "straight" and the "crooked," and a word especially important in Pound's translation of Confucius, "process" (see 38.VI.vii.36 / Turnbull, pp. 204–05; 51.I.viii.9 / p. 57; 31.V.viii.4 / p. 173; 45.III.vii.1 / p. 103; and 2.IV.vii.8E / pp. 141–42).

[29] Relevant passages in the *Enneads* are: 30.III.viii.6 / Turnbull, comp., *The Essence of Plotinus,* p. 112; 9.VI.ix.10 / Turnbull, p. 221; 47 or 48.III.iif.1 / p. 75; 22.VI.iv.3 / pp. 184–85; and 47 or 48.III.ii.1 / pp. 75–76. The passage on Aphrodite (30.III.vii.6 / Turnbull, p. 112) in particular suggests a Neoplatonic source for Pound's visions of the "eyes" in the "Pisan" and later Cantos, eyes that have been discussed by Massimo Bacigalupo, *The Formed Trace: The Later Poetry of Ezra Pound* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1980), as being the eyes of Aphrodite.

About *immaculata* as a term from the Catholic mass, see Carroll F. Terrell, *A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1980 and 1984), II, 446 (in reference to Canto LXXX/513). Pound also found the word "unmixed" in Morrison's definition of 純 (*ch'un*) (*A Dictionary of the Chinese Language in Three Parts,* I:1, p. 3), a word in the Chinese text of this passage, but this does not diminish the significance of Pound's choice out of all the other words Morrison offers of the Neoplatonic "unmixed."

[30] In Chapter XXI of the *Pivot,* Pound interprets 明 (*ming*) as indicative of light, translating it as "intelligence," "reason," and "the light of reason." Pauthier had also used a metaphor of light in his translation of XXI: "quelque ignorant qu'il soit, il deviendra nécessairement éclairé" and "la haute lumière de l'intelligence qui nait de la perfection morale." The difference between this light in Chapter XXI and the closing vision of light is that the latter is more transcendent in nature than the light of intelligence in the earlier passage.

[31] Morrison, *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language, in Three Parts,* I:3, p. 704.

[32] Pound, *Confucius, The Great Digest, The Unwobbling Pivot, The Analects,* p. 20; and Morrison, *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language, in Three Parts,* I:2, p. 769. Kenner is even more bold in his pictographic analysis of 顯 (*hsien*) than Morrison and implies, misleadingly, that Pound was, too: 頁 (*yeh*), according to

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Kenner, is "head," 絲 (*ssu*)—written as 糸 when it forms part of a compound character—is "silk thread," and 日 (*jih*) is "sun" (Kenner, *The Pound Era,* pp. 144–45). Kenner's gloss of 絲 (*ssu*) as "silk" is correct; but "cocoon" and "silkworms" does not accord with anything in Mathews' *Chinese-English Dictionary* or in Pound's source, Morrison, and Kenner presents no evidence that Pound saw a "cocoon" and "silkworms" in the word 顯 (*hsien*).

[33] Leon Surette, *A Light from Eleusis: A Study of Ezra Pound's Cantos* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979). While *A Light from Eleusis* is rich in its explication of the presence of Eleusis in the *Cantos,* Surette draws an only implicit connection between Eleusis and Neoplatonism, discussing Heydon, Apollonius, and Erigena, for instance, without addressing the subject of the elements of a Neoplatonic or Neopythagorean light philosophy in their thought.

[34] In "Cavalcanti, Medievalism" (1934), Pound argues that Cavalcanti was steeped, possibly by means of Averroës, in ideas about light similar to those held by John Scotus Erigena and Robert Grosseteste (see T. S. Eliot, ed., *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound,* pp. 149–200).

[35] Walter B. Michaels, "Pound and Erigena," *Paideuma,* 1, No. 1 (Spring and Summer 1972).

[36] I am grateful to Professor Wallace Martin for alerting me to this passage in the "China Cantos." In "An English Version of Grosseteste's *De luce,*" *Paideuma,* 2, No. 3 (Winter 1973), C. F. Terrell gives the correct Latin (p. 463) for this passage and translates it as, "By its essential nature, light shines in all directions . . ." (p. 455).

[37] This is my translation (brackets are also mine) of four paragraphs from the typescript of an essay by Pound in Italian, entitled "Ta Hio," Beinecke Library, Yale University. Though the essay is undated, its content suggests that it was written between 1942 and 1944, when Pound's two Italian translations of the *Ta Hsüeh* were published. (Gallup, *Ezra Pound: A Bibliography,* lists an article entitled "Ta Hio" that was published in the *Meridiano di Roma* in 1941, but the essay in typescript at the Beinecke is not necessarily the same as that published in 1941.)

[38] From the typescript for *L'asse che non vacilla,* the 1945 Italian version of *The Unwobbling Pivot,* Beinecke Library, Yale. The Italian is: "La metafisica confuciana sorge dalla luce; i studiosi dossono far confronti colla scholastica; col Grosseteste, o coi versi di Guido Cavalcanti (nella Donna mi prega)." In another typescript at the Beinecke for an essay in Italian, titled "Confucio Totalitario," Pound compares Confucianism's concept of "light proceeding from the sun, from the moon reflected . . . to the treatise 'De luce' of Grosseteste and Cavalcanti's 'Donna mi prega.' Light of the good of the intellect descending from the sky; it penetrates the conscience, and it irradiates itself in action" [my translation of Pound's Italian].

[39] Pound is not alone in describing the *Chung Yung* as containing the Confucian metaphysics. In *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), p. 95, Wing-tsit Chan notes the "religious and mystical" quality of the *Chung Yung,* a book he describes as simultaneously

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"practical" and "transcendental"; in *History of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1953), II, 410, Fung Yu-lan notes the "mystic tendency" of the *Chung Yung*.

[40] See Walter B. Michaels, "Pound and Erigena"; Sharon Mayer Liber, "Casting His Gods Back into the NOUS: Two Neoplatonists and The Cantos of Ezra Pound," *Paideuma*, 2, No. 3 (Winter 1973), and Kenner, *The Pound Era*, pp. 454–56. Kenner is incorrect when he contends, on the basis of the term 道 (*tao*) in the Chinese text of the *Chung Yung*, that Pound's *The Unwobbling Pivot* is purely and Taoistically transcendental and that this conflicts with the anti-Taoist, antitranscendental polemic of the "China Cantos" (pp. 454–56). The term 道 (*tao*) is not indicative of Taoist mysticism only, for there is a Confucian *tao* or "way," a Buddhist *tao*, and a Legalist *tao*, as well as a Taoist *tao*, each to be distinguished from the others.

[41] Charles Norman, *Ezra Pound* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), p. 396. This is what Pound said to a reporter on May 8, 1945, less than a week after his arrest and imprisonment at the Disciplinary Training Center near Pisa.

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Thomas Pynchon's Intrusion in the Enchanter's Domain

Michael W. Vella

In November 1960, not long after Thomas Pynchon left Greenwich Village where he had been working on *V.*, the D'Arcy Galleries opened a show of surrealist art directed by André Breton and Marcel Duchamp. The "Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanter's Domain," as the show was called, was the culmination of a long and fruitful contact between New York's artistic avant-garde and the French surrealists, leaving a permanent influence in American painting that has often been commented upon and at times debated.[1] This exchange between New York artistic circles and the French surrealists influenced not only the plastic arts, but the literary ones as well. Despite this, the attention given to the literary traces of the surrealists' intrusion in the enchanter's domain, as they termed the United States, has been scant and largely limited to poetry. Literary critics simply have not given nearly the attention art critics have to the surrealist presence in New York and its effects on our culture. As a consequence, a certain impoverishment exists in our understanding of contemporary literary history, not to mention literary forms.

A case in point is Thomas Pynchon. Despite numerous allusions and references in *V.* to surrealism, for example, no literary analyses among the scores of articles devoted to *V.* since its publication in 1963 have taken into account the depth of Pynchon's involvement with the surrealist aesthetic. One suspects that the extremely reticent Pynchon may have felt obliged to put his cards on the table recently, when he wrote in the "Introduction" to *Slow Learner*, his collection of five early stories, four of them written while he was a student at Cornell, "I had

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been taking one of those elective courses in Modern Art, and it was the Surrealists who'd really caught my attention." But Pynchon goes on,

> Having as yet virtually no access to my dream life, I missed the main point of the movement, and became fascinated instead with the simple idea that one could combine inside the same frame elements not normally found together to produce illogical and startling effects. What I had to learn later on was the necessity of managing this procedure with some degree of care and skill: any old combination of details will not do.[2]

Aside from expressing Pynchon's youthful interest in surrealism, these remarks, so uncharacteristically public for Pynchon, evidence an adherence to surrealist principles; for if Pynchon's attention to the surrealists had been merely youthful literary faddishness, in 1984 he would not be affirming that there is a right way to perform surrealist assemblage and a wrong way. If Pynchon had only a superficial connection with surrealism he would not engage in such candid self-criticism. What is important here, above all, is Pynchon's avowal of his interest in, his efforts at, and his enthusiasm for at least two of surrealism's techniques—the exploitation of one's dreams and assemblage. Pynchon may have felt pushed to comment thus, because those of his critics who have used "surrealistic" to describe his work leave it on the superficial level of the bizarre, the unreal, the grotesque. Remarkably, Pynchon's commitment to a surrealist aesthetic has gone unnoticed, and this has been unfortunate; understanding Pynchon's connections with surrealism would have better placed him in the contexts of contemporary literary history.

To consider Pynchon's connections with surrealism the best place, perhaps, to begin is with a textual correlation between *V.* and the French surrealist presence in New York. Reproduced below are two title pages. The first is from *V.* and consists of an enlarged blocked-in letter V. composed of many small letter V's:[3]

The purpose of this title page is to reinforce graphically one of Pynchon's themes, that V. has multiple meanings and is a whole greater than any of its small V. parts. Such a graphic display would not tell us much more than that, however, were it not for the fact that *V.*'s title page mimics another such title page far more important for what we are getting at here. This second title page was produced by André Breton in June 1942 for the first number of *VVV*, the surrealist review published in New York.[4]

Much like Pynchon's V. of the novel's title page, Breton's V has multiple significations (the pseudo-formula VVV = v+v+v tells us as

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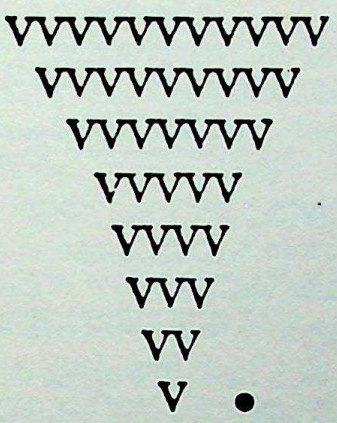
much). V is a "vow—and energy—to return to a habitable and conceivable world"; V is for Victory over the forces of "regression and death"; V is for the "emancipation of the spirit" and the "liberation of man"; V is "activity"; V is the view of the eye turned toward the internal as well as the external world; V is the synthesis of the inward and outward, and the Ego and Self. Most importantly, in Breton's words, V is "the continual systematic enlargement of the field of consciousness towards a total view." It "translates all the reactions of the eternal on the actual" and above all "takes account of the myth in the process of formation beneath the VEIL of happenings."[5]



It is difficult to imagine a better, ready gloss on Pynchon's novel than André Breton's title page to *VVV*, and it is likely that the avant-garde review is another source for Pynchon's voracious imagination. Considering his extensive reading and familiarity with the New York art museums and avant-garde scene, it is likely Pynchon knew of *VVV* since it often figures in expositions of surrealist art and is frequently mentioned in discussions of the movement.[6] It is likely *VVV* was referred to in Pynchon's art history elective at Cornell, but it is certain that both *VVV* and *View* were available on the open stacks of the New York Public Library where Pynchon researched and worked on *V*. Beyond the consideration of *VVV* as a source for *V*., however, looms the far more important question about why surrealism would so engage a young American novelist and leave its stamp on the form his writing would take.

One of the most marked features of the surrealist movement is its historical position between the two world wars. If the roots of surrealism lie in reaction to the mass carnage of World War I, the arrival of World War II only further stimulated the movement's urgent

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TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

VVV

Poetry, plastic arts, anthropology, sociology, psychology

EDITOR: DAVID HARE

Editorial advisers: André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst

NUMBER 4 ***FEBRUARY 1944***

VVV

that is, V+VV+V. We say . . . — . . . — . . . —

that is, not only

V as a vow—and energy—to return to a habitable and conceivable world, Victory over the forces of regression and of death unloosed at present on the earth, but also V beyond this first Victory, for this world can no more, and ought no more, be the same, V over that which tends to perpetuate the enslavement of man by man,

and beyond this

VV of that double Victory, V again over all that is opposed to the emancipation of the spirit, of which the first indispensable condition is the liberation of man,

whence

VVV towards the emancipation of the spirit, through these necessary stages: it is only in this that our activity can recognize its end

Or again:

one knows that to

V which signifies the View around us, the eye turned towards the external world, the conscious surface,

some of us have not ceased to oppose

VV the View inside us, the eye turned toward the interior world and the depths of the unconscious,

whence

VVV towards a synthesis, in a third term, of these two Views, the first V with its axis on the EGO and the reality principle, the second VV on the SELF and the pleasure principle—the resolution of their contradiction tending only to the continual, systematic enlargement of the field of consciousness towards a total view,

VVV

which translates all the reactions of the eternal upon the actual, of the psychic upon the physical, and takes account of the myth in process of formation beneath the VEIL of happenings.

CONTENTS

André Breton: Les Etats Généraux

Benjamin Péret: La Pensée est Une et indivisible

E. L. T. Mésens: Le Troisième Front

Philip Lamantia: Poems

Aimé Césaire: Batouque

Jean Rollin: Poème

Robert Allerton Parker: Cannibal Designs

Pierre Mabille: Le Paradis

Patrick Waldberg, *Robert Lebel*, *Georges Duthuit*: Vers un nouveau mythe? Prémonitions et défiances.

J. B. Brunius: Danger de Mort

Georges Hénein: Histoire vague

Charles Duits: Clitonne

Leonora Carrington: Down below

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

Leonora Carrington, Julio de Diego, Enrico Donati, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Jimmy Ernst, Esteban Frances, Gerzso, David Hare, Frederick J. Kiesler, Wifredo Lam, Jacqueline Lamba, Maria, Matta, Frederick Sommer, Yves Tanguy, Dorothea Tanning, Isabelle Waldberg.

THIS FOURTH ISSUE IS PRESENTED WITH A COVER BY MATTA

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call for a liberated consciousness that might alter human history and redirect it on a less violent path.

Not only did World War II give further impetus to the surrealist artist-revolutionaries, it also deracinated them from the European capitals besieged by Nazism, sending them into exile in that great melting pot of twentieth-century art movements, New York City, where they left a continuing if not always obvious influence.[7] Fleeing the Occupation in self-imposed exile, Breton, Masson, Tanguy, Ray, Ernst, Duchamp, among others—all found themselves in New York during the early Forties, and it was not long before they began stirring for a review in which to express themselves.

Their first vehicle of expression was an extant literary magazine called *View*. *View* presented surrealist graphics and texts from 1940 until 1945, but because it was eclectic and not thoroughly and uniquely committed to the surrealist cause, André Breton soon became dissatisfied with it. By 1942, together with David Hare, Marcel Duchamp, and Max Ernst, he launched the more uniformly surrealistic *VVV*. Together with *Minotaure*, *VVV* was one of the most impressive of the surrealist reviews.[8] Both *VVV* and *View* were early vehicles of surrealist expression in New York, and they anticipate Pynchon's *V.*, but for the moment, suffice it to say that Pynchon shares the vision of the surrealists exiled in New York, and the key to understanding this shared vision is the nexus of Breton's manifesto to *VVV*, the avant-garde ferment of New York City in the Forties and Fifties, the surrealists' engagé aesthetic, and the twentieth-century calamity of World War II.

As is true for the surrealists, what most animates Pynchon's writing is a reaction to war and technologically efficient mass violence. *V.* is an exploration of what it is about human consciousness, history, indeed knowledge, that yields war and destruction. But *V.* is not an antiwar novel as, say, *The Enormous Room*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *Johnny Got His Gun*, or *The Naked and the Dead* are. Pynchon is less concerned with realistically portraying the ravages of war in order to provoke revulsion in his readers, and far more concerned with at least momentarily altering the reader's very consciousness, redirecting it, as it were, from its usual destructive course.

It is in this sense that Pynchon's seeming disregard for realism must be considered, as if *V.* were a recent version of those "border-fictions" that Richard Chase called "romances,"[9] skirting the real and the imagined; and it is in this sense that *V.*'s prose style ought to be seen, a stylistic attempt to create "a world elsewhere," those "extravagances of

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language" that Richard Poirier sees as the American writer's "exultation in the exercise of consciousness momentarily set free."[10] In this regard *V.* is within the tradition of the American novel. But insofar as *V.* is a novel that points at the need for "a habitable and conceivable world," that argues for a Victory over the forces of regression and death, that pushes for "the continual systematic enlargement of the field of consciousness towards the total view," Pynchon is perpetuating the literary project of André Breton and the French surrealists exiled in New York City in the Forties. Both *VVV* and *V.*, and both the surrealists and Pynchon have essentially the same vision. Their view is of the panoply of human history issuing in, as Pynchon says, "20th Century nightmare" (p. 303). How this vision is expressed in literary form, in the case of *V.*, remains to be seen.

The surrealist credo was basically that rationality and conventional social behavior stood between mankind and truth, and that ultimately these were traits leading to war and repression. Surrealism postulated that if these barriers of rationality and convention were torn down, a sudden and unprecedented eruption of ultimate reality—the surreal—would take place. In short, the nonrational knowledge needed to alter the destructive course of human history needed to be achieved nonrationally.[11]

To accomplish their ends the surrealists had various strategies to make us see with the scales fallen from our eyes, to accomplish that total vision that André Breton spoke about. Basically, these strategies consisted of a few aesthetic maneuvers: an almost indiscriminate eclecticism, a studied flaunting of convention, and a persistent yoking together of dissimilar elements. Marcel Duchamp once remarked that the surrealists did not create images but actions, and it is true that surrealist art demands of its spectators an aesthetic activity qualitatively different from that demanded by other artistic styles. The surrealist technique of praxis in lieu of image was to be achieved primarily by juxtaposing objects in totally unexpected, but subconsciously "correct" ways; by creating in language vertiginous shifts in syntax, diction, metaphor, and tone; by acting out in public, demonstrations of eccentricity. In short, the surrealists engaged in a broad assault on norms and conventions of all sorts, but above all the aesthetic and the social, the rational and the bourgeois.

Inasmuch as Pynchon shares the surrealist vision, *V.* evidences many surrealist artistic and technical preoccupations. For example, a complex pattern of interconnected and typically surrealist percepts is built up in the novel: the world of *V.* is one of dreams, visions, chance,

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correspondances; it is a world where objects, abstract systems, and urban streets predominate. These are all essentially surrealist percepts,[12] and how they are woven into the metaphoric fabric of *V.* becomes clear if we take a few examples.

The Street that Pynchon describes in *V.*, with at least one reference to the specifically surrealist street in paintings by de Chirico (p. 282), derives from the surrealists' random, urban promenades (in the sense of the French verb *flâner*) meant to yield haphazard epiphanies. In *V.* the activity of *flâner* finds its analogue in "yo-yoing," the bouncing back and forth like a yo-yo, whether in New York streets or subway. Of the characters in *V.*, Benny Profane is the most preoccupied with the Street: "Though the street had claimed a big fraction of Profane's age, it and he remained strangers in every way. . . . He walked; walked, he thought sometimes . . . his only function to want" (p. 27). Profane eventually learns from the Street, but for our purposes here, what is of interest is to see how Pynchon works this perceived Street in with other surrealistic percepts, the dream, for example:

> Profane had grown a little leery of streets, especially streets like this. They had in fact all fused into a single abstracted Street, which come the full moon he would have nightmares about. (p. 2)

> In this dream, he was all alone as usual. Walking on a street at night where there was nothing but his own field of vision alive. . . . This was all there was to dream: all there ever was: the Street. (pp. 30–31)

> What peace there had been was over. He had come back to the surface, the dream street. (p. 137)

But the Street exists for other characters as well. Fausto Maijstral, for example, writes in his literary journal:

> But in dream there are two worlds: the street and under the street. One is the kingdom of death and one of life. And how can a poet live without exploring the other kingdom, even if only as a kind of tourist? A poet feeds on dream. (p. 304)

Or (and here I must quote Pynchon at length):

> It is a universal sin among the . . . unimaginative to refuse to let well enough alone. Their compulsion to gather together, their pathological fear of loneliness extends on past the threshold of sleep; so that when they turn the corner, as we all must as we all have done and do—and some more often than others—to find ourselves on the street. . . . You know the street I mean. . . . The

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> street of the 20th Century, at whose far end or turning—we hope—is some sense of home or safety. But no guarantees. A street we are put at the wrong end of, for reasons best known to the agents who put us there. If there are agents. But a street we must walk. . . . The street and the dreamer, only an inconsequential shadow himself in the landscape, partaking of the soullessness of these other masses and shadows; this is 20th Century nightmare. (p. 303)

I do not wish here to interpret Pynchon's Street, but merely to suggest that it is a surrealistic street that has its primary intersection with dreams. In *V.* the Street is a thoroughfare where the ordinary traffic of the world transpires with hallucinogenic intensity, but underneath which occurs the hyperreality where priests evangelize sewer rats and characters hunt the alligators that haunt New York sewers. The point is that the Street in *V.* is not a real street at all; nor is it an allegorical or a symbolic street. It is, as I have been suggesting here, a perceived street, of the sort one sees in paintings by de Chirico or Paul Delvaux, but one constructed in language instead of with paints and canvas.

There are many other connections between elements of *V.* and the percepts of the surrealists, but perhaps we should briefly consider the most important of these and that is V. itself.[13] Without attempting to explicate its many meanings, I would like here to consider the V. of Vheissu, for this aspect of V. brings together much of the surrealism shaping the novel's structure.

First of all, Vheissu is an "outlandish" region "where the Establishment holds no sway" (p. 143). Reached by a route reminiscent of James Hilton's 1933 best-seller, *Lost Horizon* (Frank Capra's 1937 film version is probably Pynchon's source), Vheissu resembles a hallucinogenic Shangri-la. "'There,'" one character says, "'dreams are not, not closer to the waking world, but somehow, I think, they do seem more real'" (pp. 155–56). In Vheissu colors are exceptionally vibrant. Iridescent monkeys abound. Tribes of blue-skinned people exist. Cities are constructed under volcanoes. In short, a phantasmagoria of visual experience inundates the visitor. Vheissu means different things to different persons, however. For Godolphin, Vheissu may only be a "dream of annihilation" (p. 193), or even a hallucination. He says, "'Does it make any difference? . . . If it were only a hallucination, it was not what I saw or believed I saw that in the end is important. It is what I thought. What truth I came to'" (p. 190). Vheissu is, then, a visionary experience whose truth exceeds whatever rational dimension in reality Vheissu has or does not have. Godolphin says:

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> "There's been a war . . . Vheissu was a luxury, an indulgence. We can no longer afford the likes of Vheissu. . . . Whether we like it or not the war destroyed a kind of privacy, perhaps the privacy of dream . . . our Vheissus are no longer our own, or even confined to a circle of friends; they're public property." (p. 230)

As far as Godolphin is concerned, Vheissu is threatened by twentieth-century nightmare. For Stencil, who searches for Vheissu and V. in order to better understand his father, this visionary Shangri-la of the mind, the very dream of it, is a way of keeping alive, animate, human. It gives him, for example, "a sphere of influence roughly congruent with that of his skull, private colonies of the imagination whose borders were solidly defended against the Establishment's incursions, or depredations" (pp. 143–44). But Pynchon further suggests that belief in Vheissu not only insures authenticity, it implies a change in consciousness as well: "Belief in Vheissu gave [Stencil] no right any more to doubt as arrogantly as he had before, that perhaps wherever he went from now on he would perform like penance a ready acceptance of miracles or visions . . ." (p. 184). Victoria Wren, herself an avatar of V., says of Vheissu that it is perhaps the only source of "radiance" left (p. 185). Vheissu is less a matter of earthly geography and more a matter of the geography of mind and consciousness.

Vheissu is above all located in *V.*'s readers. More than in the desire of Stencil to believe in Vheissu at all cost, or in the tortured nostalgia of Godolphin or Stencil Sr. who had "found" and subsequently "lost" Vheissu, or for that matter in the imagination of Pynchon himself, Vheissu is in the consciousness of the novel's readers, or at least that is what *V.* would have us believe. In a play on words, Pynchon tells us as much: for "Vheissu" is nothing less than the paronomasic encoding of "V is You." With that pun Pynchon interjects the visionary experience of *V.* into his readers once and for all. As Paola says to Benny Profane—and her words could be Pynchon's to us—"'Read . . . and see'" (p. 238). In short, *V.* is an attempt to provoke the phantasmagoric experience of Vheissu, or at least the thirst for it, in its readers, altering their consciousness and attuning them to surreality so that like Evan Godolphin and Herbert Stencil, they will no longer be allowed to "doubt as arrogantly as they had before, the ready acceptance of miracles and visions."

Vheissu and the Street, however, are only two examples of surrealist percepts that function in *V.* Dreams, visions, objects, *correspondance*, chance—all play their part in the complex patterns of *V.* and all are key aspects of surrealist vision and praxis. More importantly

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for us here, however, is to see how these percepts comprise a nexus of surrealistic values Pynchon pits through *V.* against the forces of destruction, mass violence, and war, in short, all that issues in twentieth-century nightmare. Insofar as Pynchon advances surreality as a countervailing force against the incursions and depredations of the Establishment, he is undertaking the same revolutionary project—and this primarily an aesthetic rather than, say, a political one—that André Breton expressed in the title page to *VVV*.

If the surrealists hoped to provoke a salutary nonrational knowledge by therapeutic nonrational means, their strategies depended in large measure on an eclectic use of sources that seemed to them nonrational and primary. *Épater le bourgeois* was their motto, and in order to shock and provoke they used a gamut of popular, offbeat, and at times arcane forms of expression to develop their work. Their sources were varied: the art of the insane or *art brut*; "primitive" arts from Polynesia, Africa, Mexico, and Central America; popular art forms such as jazz, commedia dell' arte, circuses, burlesque, and silent film comedy; necromancy and the occult arts. All provided the surrealists with stimuli to arouse their creativity, awaken their subconsciousness, and, above all, provoke their spectators by piercing staid bourgeois respectability and upsetting its art forms.

Like the surrealists, Pynchon is eclectic. But his eclecticism is necessarily different from theirs inasmuch as he is a novelist, a writer whose plastics are narrative forms. Pynchon's eclecticism consists of a gathering together of literary modes and types of information (myth, history, legend, science, popular culture) that are subsequently manipulated and juxtaposed in *V.* as if these were the raw materials of a surrealist assemblage. For example, Pynchon juxtaposes short parodies of hackneyed genres such as hagiography and B-movies (the Father Fairing episode), pulp paperback romances (Mafia's Theory of Romantic Love), historical narration (Mondaugan's story), black humor and the grotesque (Esther's nose job), and the literary journal (Fausto Maijstral's diaries). By yoking together in unexpected and thoroughly unconventional ways various forms of narrative discourse and literary genres, Pynchon constantly disrupts reader expectations conditioned as these are by more conventional novels.

This surrealistic technique of assembling and rearranging "objects" is replicated in other ways in *V.* as well. The surrealists' irreverent humor is replicated in Pynchon's jokes, songs, ditties, anecdotes—his continual onslaught on reader expectations, for even in a comic novel there is a foundation of earnestness that one doubts at times exists in *V.*

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Sometimes this desire to affront is merely a matter of tastelessness: when Profane and Wedge play poker for prophylactics, Wedge loses "30 in the hole" and makes an "appropriate comment" (p. 19). When Dewey Gland is asked to sing an "Algerian pacifist" song, he responds with an off-the-wall rendition of Elvis Presley's "Blue Suede Shoes." Examples of such admittedly sophomoric humor in *V.* can be multiplied, and Pynchon's humor would be rather deficient were it not that its purpose is to irritate as well as to amuse. *Épater le bourgeois*, insisted the surrealists, and like them Pynchon tries to keep his readers stunned, even ill at ease, with his incessant arch humor and his constant shifts in tone. The reader is never meant to relax with the rhythms of the prose, or to be fascinated by the architecture of plot, or to identify with characters, or for that matter respond "normally" to elements of more conventional novels, for *V.* has more in common with the "art as action" that Marcel Duchamp described, more in common with the Dadaist "ready-mades"[14] cited in its pages, more in common as I have suggested, with assemblage than it does with what we most frequently consider a novel. To liberate his reader's consciousness, Pynchon has gathered disparate forms of knowledge and discourse, pieces of literary detritus and debris—anything in fact that smacks of ossified forms of thought—and conjoined, reassembled, and revivified these in *V.* into a totality that aspires to something new—a literature of surreality.

There are, however, problems with works such as *V.*, for if it would have us see with the "total vision" described by André Breton in *VVV* it still will enable us to see only so far, and only partially at that.

For one, *V.* requires a particularly active kind of reading:[15] its associative leaps;[16] its shifts in chronology, tone, prose style; its manner of treating a detail realistically and as an abstraction at one and the same time; its incessant wordplay; its transformations of character: all these forms of cavorting in prose require a willingness to play and a readiness of response that is perhaps not in the disposition of every reader. The surrealists' strategy of action over image demands a creative eagerness on the part of the spectators of surrealist art that may be fundamentally in conflict with what we do when we read novels, that is, there may be a profound conflict between surrealism and its ideological assumptions and the genre of the novel itself.

The manner in which the spectator of surrealist art responds, for example, is primarily in terms of space: the breakdown of audience/actors in theater and event; the vertiginous "leaping" in association and image in surrealist poetry; the juxtapositioning of familiar objects in unfamiliar ways in sculpture, painting, and drawing; the typographic

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and graphic experiments on the field of the page and sheet: all of these surrealist strategies depend in some way on spatial relationships. Like these surrealist manipulations of objects in space, *V.*'s surrealism depends on its being a totality whose parts exist as objects in and of themselves while still being parts of a whole. Another way of saying this is that the various verbal modes in *V.* have a spatial relationship to one another, so much so that if the reader does not manage to keep to the "total view" espoused by Breton, much of *V.*'s meaning is lost. Form in *V.* is, indeed, spatial. But keeping to this total view of the novel is difficult to do, and virtually impossible upon the first reading.

All this is to say that while *V.* encourages such a unique, totalizing reading experience, and while it provokes or implores it of its readers, the one thing *V.* and works like it cannot do is make readers not already predisposed to such an experience have it. That is, *V.* probably cannot precipitate vision or execute changes in consciousness, even ephemeral ones, in readers not already receptive to such altered states prior to their reading. It is a case of those with sight leading those who can see, with the figuratively myopic remaining forever behind.

That a novel like *V.* only confirms states of consciousness and perceptions—in fact, *values*—already shared by its readers would not be particularly disturbing if it were not for the fact that such "engaged" literature often has as its project the liberation of consciousness and the provocation of vision in the fettered and the blind. The surrealists are a good case in point: while the movement was and remains a significant one in the history of art, the gap between its ambitions, a tension-wrought blend of revolutionary politics and the aesthetic, and its accomplishments, is probably its most remarkable characteristic. Such a limitation—that the literature of liberation only frees the already unfettered—would not be disturbing were it not for the fact that the literature itself often seems to be claiming powers to the contrary.

This is not to argue, however, that a surrealistic work such as *V.* is self-indulgent, but it is important to recognize its limits, for it is precisely in these limits where such literature becomes important. Despite how far short of its ambitions *V.*, and works like it, might fall, it still forces us by its very subversion to question our suppositions about the novel as a form, and ultimately the ideological presuppositions on which the genre itself is based. Knowing that the exiled surrealists in New York, for example, did not produce masterpieces (the word would have been anathema to them) or that their efforts to alter consciousness away from destructiveness did not diminish twentieth-century nightmare does not for a moment lessen their importance: their importance

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for the artistic fact of a Motherwell, a Pollock, a Henry Miller (who published in *View*), or for that matter a Thomas Pynchon, on whose visionary and creative predispositions they most fortunately did have a liberating impact.

The enthusiasm for a better world, the deep discontent and malaise of the decades between the two world wars, the underground rumblings of revolt throughout the Fifties, erupted in full force in the Sixties, cresting as if on a massive historical wave, when for nearly a decade it seemed as if horizons retracted and there was a vision of unlimited possibility, when a far larger number of people than the coterie of exiled surrealists hoped, as Breton and his followers had once done, for the "continual systematic enlargement of the field of consciousness towards a total view." *V.*'s appearance in 1963 anticipated this resurgent social enthusiasm, what has been variously called the youth and countercultural movement. In 1942, before a group of Yale students, Breton said "Surrealism appeals to youth as the only defense against the rationalism and 'good sense' of adult generations which twice in twenty years have brought catastrophe upon humanity. Surrealism was born of the unlimited faith in the *genius* of youth."[17] In 1960, the young Pynchon was in Greenwich Village writing *V.* amid the swirling currents of the New York art and bohemian scene.

All this is to say that insofar as Pynchon shares certain of the surrealists' technical strategies, as I have argued above, he shares their vision, their countercultural, subversive values as well. It would be erroneous, however, to see such values as ephemeral, for the fact that *V.* was written by a young American imbued with the vision of de Chirico, Breton, and Duchamp, among others, is the best proof that other younger artists and writers will come along, nurtured by this "total view," as far as it exists, hoping ever to alter human consciousness, subverting it away from mass destruction and twentieth-century nightmare.

In this regard, Pynchon's *V.* anticipated the decades that made of it something of a cult novel which expressed, in turn, a large measure of a generation's values. In this light, *V.* can be seen as a link between the surrealist movement and the counterculture of the Sixties. Pynchon's essentially subversive vision, like that of the surrealists, is open to attack from both the Left and the Right, for the "total vision" and "surreality" he espouses transcend conventional ideologies:

> "If there is any political moral to be found in this world . . . it is that we carry on the business of this century with an intolerable double vision. Right and Left; the hothouse and the street. The

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> Right can only live and work hermetically, in the hothouse of the past, while outside the Left prosecute their affairs in the streets by manipulated mob violence. And cannot live but in the dreamscape of the future. What of the present, the men-of-no-politics, the once-respectable Golden Mean? Obsolete; in any case, lost sight of. In a West of such extremes we can expect, at the very least, a highly 'alienated' populace within not many more years." (p. 440)

It is finally Pynchon's political affinity with the surrealists with which we should close, for he seems to be saying in *V.* that the ultimate reservoir of human freedom resides in a unified view, a "total view" once again, that transcends the "intolerable double vision" of the Right and the Left, the ultimate in categorical thinking and ossified forms of thought that characterize an Establishment most notable for its rationalism and "good sense," as Breton pointed out to the students at Yale, and for its creation of twentieth-century nightmare.

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[1] The arrival of the surrealists in New York in the Forties was especially important for the then maturing group of American artists who would come to be called Abstract Expressionists. Jackson Pollock said, for example, that "the fact that good European moderns are now here is very important, for they bring with them an understanding of the problems of modern painting. I am particularly impressed with their concept of the source of art being the Unconscious." Artists like Motherwell, Pollock, and Rothko were open to surrealist influences, especially technical matters such as collage, frottage, assemblage, and automatism. These techniques liberated the young American artists from the classicism that made up their training. According to art historian Lucy Lippard, the surrealists' "ideas and techniques have expanded and been absorbed so thoroughly that traces of the original esthetic and anti-esthetic can be found in the most unlikely places." Lucy Lippard, ed., *Surrealists on Art* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1970), p. 212. Pollock's reflections are in Sam Hunter, *Jackson Pollock* (Exposition Catalogue, Museum of Modern Art. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956–1957), p. 33. See also pp. 8–9 for Hunter's discussion of surrealism and abstract expressionism. Important, too, is William S. Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982), pp. 159–86.

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[2] Thomas Pynchon, *Slow Learner: Early Stories* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984), p. 20.

[3] Thomas Pynchon, *V.* (New York: Lippincott, 1963; Bantam Paperback Edition, 1973). All page references are to this paperback edition, and are cited parenthetically in the text.

[4] The title page of *VVV* is reproduced from the fourth number (with a cover by Matta) published in New York in February 1944.

[5] The title page of *VVV* is presented in Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, Exposition Catalogue, Hayward Gallery, London, Jan. 11-Mar. 27, 1978 (Arts Council of Great Britain: Westerham Press, 1978), p. 376. The page also is reproduced in Lippard, *Surrealists on Art*, p. 212.

[6] There is much internal evidence in *V.* to suggest the extent of Pynchon's familiarity with surrealism and *VVV*. See my "Pynchon, *V.*, and the French Surrealists," in *Pynchon Notes*, Spring 1988. In 1944, for example, Paul Bowles published a translation of de Chirico's surrealistic novel *Hebdomeros* in *View*. No other English version was available until 1966, three years after Pynchon mentions the novel in *V.* Pynchon could have heard about de Chirico's novel without having read it, or he could have read it in French. There is textual evidence in *V.*, however, that suggests he had seen the Bowles translation in *View*. See *View*, Ser. 4, Aut. 1944, and No. 4, Dec. 1944.

[7] Lippard, *Surrealists on Art*, p. 212; Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage*, pp. 159–86.

[8] Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, p. 376.

[9] From Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, in *Reality and Myth in American Literature*, Kay House, ed. (Literature and Ideas Series: Irving Howe, General Editor, New York: World Library, 1966), p. 299.

[10] Richard Poirier, *A World Elsewhere*: *The Place of Style in American Literature* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), p. 7. A number of Poirier's remarks are appropriate here: "The classic American writers try through style temporarily to set free the hero (and the reader) from systems, to free them from the pressures of time, biology, economics, and from the social forces which are ultimately the undoing of American heroes and quite often of their creators" (p. 5). "The crucial problem for the best American writers is . . . to find a language that will at once express and protest states of consciousness that cannot adequately be defined by conventional formulations even of a more sophisticated derivation from Marx, Freud, or Norman O. Brown. The problem is stylistic" (p. 11).

[11] Nahma Sandrow, *Surrealism*: *Theater, Arts, Ideas* (New York: Harper, 1972), p. 21. See Patrick Waldberg, *Surrealism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971). Mr. Waldberg took part in New York surrealist activities from 1941 to 1951. For a general history of surrealism see Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, trans. R. Howard (New York, Macmillan, 1965), and Herbert S. Gersham, *The Surrealist Revolution in France* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1974).

[12] Certain elements in Pynchon's novel that we might usually call metaphors, symbols, or sign are more rightly termed *percepts*. A percept is the "object of perception" and has, I think, the connotations needed for a critical response to the Street, Vheissu, even V. herself, especially if we consider these in terms of surrealism.

[13] "The cult of the mythical woman . . . lies at the heart of the surrealist

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credo," said Roger Shattuck in his Introduction to Nadeau's *The History of Surrealism*. In terms of the character V., her avatars, and surrealism, see Xavier Gauthier, *Surréalisme et sexualité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), and Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985).

[14] For a definition of "ready-mades" see José Pierre, *An Illustrated Dictionary of Surrealism*, trans. W. J. Strachan (Woodbury, N.Y.: Barron's Educational Series, 1979), pp. 58–59.

[15] Richard Poirier writes, "In the complications of their language and in their structural ingenuities, they force the reader to actually participate in 'the struggle for verbal consciousness' that is to liberate us from customary suppositions." According to Poirier, the reason why many of these works are read badly is because they require their readers to "submit to a discipline, imposed by the difficulties in the writing, that will develop in [them] a consciousness rarely called forth" (Poirier, *A World Elsewhere*, pp. 77–78).

[16] See Robert Bly, *Leaping Poetry: An Idea with Poems and Translations* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).

[17] Breton's lecture to the Yale French students was delivered in December 1942. It was reprinted in *VVV*, Nos. 2/3, Mar. 1943. See Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, pp. 377–78. Pynchon's "Introduction" to *Slow Learner* presents his retrospective on the youth culture of the early Sixties and the general effect on his generation of the menace of nuclear holocaust.

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The Impulse for the Ludic in the Poetics of Raymond Queneau

Constantin Toloudis

The place occupied today by Raymond Queneau in the history of French letters was secured for him relatively late. For a long time he was thought of as a minor figure, a mere entertainer, cultivating a clever, unclassifiable style of parody in narrative fiction aimed at low middle-class tastes. By the early 1950s it became obvious that his public image was undergoing a rapid transformation. Ironically, his first major success came about not with *Le Chiendent*, his first literary accomplishment considered today also his best, but fourteen years later, with *Exercices de style* (1947), which was adapted for a music-hall show and performed by the Frères Jacques in Paris. At the time he died, in 1976, at the age of seventy-three, the register of his published work included some twenty titles of novels and short fiction, several volumes of verse, translations of English and American literature, and hundreds of articles, prefaces, and book reviews on a range of subjects that has since ranked him as one of France's most prodigious polymaths and clearly as one of the major actors on the scene of France's recent cultural history.

Queneau has been called the Rabelais of the twentieth century by some, the James Joyce of France by others. He has also been likened to Jarry and Lewis Carroll, to Raymond Roussel and Borges. Although one of the pioneers of the surrealist movement, Raymond Queneau broke with André Breton in 1929 and later renounced repeatedly most of the positions he himself helped formulate in the first surrealist manifestos. Fashionable trends like existentialism, structuralism, or the new novel also left him unimpressed and, at least in some respects, his preoccupation with the nature of language transcends them all. His

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books are contrived, complex, dense. Having given away only a few of their secrets, they are today as teasing and provocative as ever.

Invoking the concept of "play" to explain Queneau has long been a familiar reflex in the pronouncements of many a "serious" critic confronted with the author's texts. That there is a "ludic" dimension in Queneau's literary works has somehow seemed self-evident. And this is not simply due to the fact that the "ludic" has always been associated, at least in part, with the essence of art. Nor is it simply an inference from authoritative formulations like the one we inherited from Huizinga, according to whom "all *poiesis* is 'play-function,'"[1] an idea that seems to have changed very little since Plato. In Queneau's case, the term "ludic" has been used to describe very specific practices, to characterize the orientation of the author's dominant rhetorical devices and textual strategies which include, as is by now widely known, parodistic word-coinage, subversive punning, inconclusive arguments, circular logic, repetition, aleatory juxtapositions, modular/combinatorial text arrangements, and the like.

Much in Queneau scholarship that touches on this subject merely reflects the desire to account for the inexplicable by simply "naming" it, as if by doing so, all that is seemingly unmotivated, even unthinkable, in Queneau's oeuvre, could be "recuperated." Alas, given the history of the concept of "play,"[2] branding something as "ludic" has implications that cannot be assumed as self-evident. If Queneau's rhetoric is found to rely heavily on devices that could be termed ludic, nothing about the meaning of his "creative" activity can be taken for granted. Nor is it clear that characterizing all of the devices mentioned above as ludic establishes a common denominator, something for which Queneau scholars tend to develop a very strong yearning, to be sure. What is clear is that there has been no attempt to study the question thoroughly. As of this date, no systematic effort has been made to assess a "lucid" factor that could be thought of as a possible source of light in which to see the totality of Queneau's published work, and thus related to the essential character of his message.[3]

What I wish to do in the discussion that follows could not presume to fill this gap. It would require a much larger project. My intention at this time is only to offer some reflections that might bring into view some of the less obvious premises in the investigation of that enigmatic presence to which Queneau enthusiasts intuitively feel so close and with which it is so difficult to come to terms.

The *homo ludens* in Queneau is a reality that was never in doubt. A good deal is known about his idiosyncrasy, the circumstances of his

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private life, his reactions to the challenges of his time and social milieu. A good deal is also known about the conscious, deliberate, choices he made in his professional life, which is that of a highly literate, university educated writer with an impressive amount of formal training in philosophy. We already have a fairly good idea of the "agonistic" side of the Queneau legend. We know quite a bit about his struggle to assert a socially acceptable image, as well as his struggle to project the image of a writer. We know of the man with the loud, disconcerting laughter, startling his interviewers with his outrageous answers, with his scandalizing pronouncements about his books, about literature, about language and the *néo-français*, pronouncements he often reformulated, corrected, or even unabashedly revoked. Among the traits remembered vividly by those who knew him, that of a player stands out in more than one way.[4] In the years that followed his graduation from the lycée, he had adjustment difficulties and periods of severe depression. Psychologically, his chronic inability to adapt to a work routine and earn a living reinforced his feeling of general inadequacy. The tendency he had to spend large portions of his time playing cards, checkers, pool, and chess was more than met the eye. There is enough circumstantial evidence to suggest this was a defense mechanism, a response to frustration and stress. But this tendency was also reinforced by a need to cope with events that occurred in his lifetime by mere coincidence.

Queneau belongs to the generation that found an irresistible attraction in Dada, in surrealism, and in Le Grand Jeu. In the mentality of this generation, *jeu* was the code word for rebellion: the message it strove so desperately to communicate was the *refusal to be serious* about a social order and a set of values that were believed discredited by history. It would be fair to assume then that Queneau's attitude was at least in part symptomatic of the malaise that afflicted writers like Daumal, or Vaillant, or Peret. It would be perfectly legitimate to see Queneau's ludic disposition as a reflection of the mood that inspired games like the *cadavre exquis*, or the "surrealist proverbs," or the juvenile histrionics of the "simplistes," the group that was to become "Le Grand Jeu." His membership in the Collège de Pataphysique is further evidence of his lasting affinity with those spheres.

When considering the author's psychological complexion in conjunction with the forces at play in his environment, it would be impossible to overlook a third factor, one that is perhaps of equal if not greater importance: Queneau's love for mathematics, a discipline in which he was as adept as professionally trained experts. The exact measure of relevance of this factor no doubt lies in the huge stakes he

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saw in exploring applications of mathematical concepts in literature. His involvement with the Oulipo and the texts he contributed to promoting its causes attest to an intellectual investment of enormous proportions. Mathematical formulations undertaken as games have always fascinated him. The signs of this love affair are in abundance. They are noticeable in the lives of his fictional characters, in the numerology he applied in arranging the components of his books, or in the articles he wrote on related subjects such as the kinematics of games.[5] In one such article, his interest in the mathematics of chess inspires him to discuss Edgar Allan Poe's "Maelzel's Chess Player."[6]

Queneau's interest in assessing Poe's "analytical" powers is revealing of an attitude that explicitly relates the practice of writing to the concept of play. In this instance, Queneau's comments go beyond the specifics of chess games and into Poe's views on poetry. There is of course no surprise that he nods with approval at Poe's assertion that poetry is the product of "reason" rather than "inspiration." That was a belief he has held unwaveringly throughout his career. But he went on to elaborate that examination of some author's drafts also supports the view that creative writing is an activity resembling that of word puzzle and crossword puzzle hackers.[7] And it is rather remarkable that in this article of 1957 the examples he cites include Roussel and Gide, and that his assessments of "The Raven" and "The Purloined Letter" lead him to suggest that Poe, along with Roussel and Gide, was a precursor of a type of formalism that became a point of focus in France in connection with the ludic in the *nouveau roman*.

To a large extent, the evidence of ludic orientation so conspicuous in Queneau's tests must be judged against that background. The impulse for the ludic treatment of language and poetics can indeed be traced back to the author's very first published texts. Allen Thiher, among others, has appraised this fairly accurately in his analysis of Queneau's texts that date prior to 1933.[8] It is a drive whose first signs one can trace to Queneau's so-called surrealist period. In this early phase of his career, a considerable amount of Freudian influence is noticeable in his writings as his rhetoric is almost indistinguishable from the rhetoric of dream interpretation, with the usual emphasis on multiple meanings that can be "condensed into a single symbol or signifier," as Thiher so aptly pointed out.[9]

It is generally agreed today that the surrealist period in Queneau's evolution is the formative phase during which a number of basic configurations that remained almost totally unchanged in his later production were determined. Among the best examples one could

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think of is the poem every Queneau enthusiast must have struggled with at one time or another, "Le Tour de l'ivoire," which was first published in *Révolution surréaliste*, in 1927. Taken literally the title would be a meaningless phrase: "the ivory's turn." The transformation of course produces a special effect, the effect of "hypertexte," to use Genette's term, since it points to its partly visible antecedent, or "hypotexte." Its deliberately transgressive formulation obviously must be perceived as a play on *la tour d'ivoire*, the phrase for "ivory tower." The content of the poem and its possible meanings have been the object of many exegetic endeavors and, as is usual in such cases, no particular interpretation can claim authority over another, except in terms of the emphasis to be placed on the author's pervasive pessimism, or in terms of what Thiher called Queneau's "revulsion before the injustice of human institutions and the inevitability of man's fall."[10]

But in subsequent works, in the period that begins with *Le Chiendent* (1933), the author's first published major work, which Queneau's own assessments classify as post-surrealist, the impulse for ludic configurations is manifest on a much broader register, and in a tone that becomes progressively firmer and more self-confident. Queneau has consistently given the impression of someone who plays, who jokes, who refuses to be serious. And as if to heighten the effect of that impression, he has consistently refused to admit that provoking laughter was his principal objective. In his critical writings, he went to considerable lengths to dispel the notion that he was a humorist, humor being for him a form of intellectual cowardice.[11] Furthermore, in the late 1930s, he was still denouncing the slogans and clichés of surrealist rhetoric, and still refused to equate exploration of the unconscious with liberation, automatic writing with freedom. In his article "Qu'est-ce que l'art," dated 1938, he wrote:

> It is necessary to preserve the lack of gratuitousness of art. Simply constructing something well amounts to reducing art to play, the novel to a chess game, the poem to a puzzle. Neither saying something nor saying something well is enough, it is necessary that it be worth saying. But what is worth saying? The answer cannot be avoided: what is useful.[12]

But in Queneau's vocabulary in those days, "useful" should be understood in a way consistent not only with his rejection of surrealism but also with the philosophical positions he formulated in the articles he published in the same period. His were positions in keeping with avant-garde trends of the time. Many are easily traceable to the Kojevian reading of Hegel, to Heidegger, to Wittgenstein. The latter

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used a criterion very similar to Queneau's notion of "usefulness" to illustrate what he called "legitimate" language games. Indeed, there is little doubt that the same philosophical attitude is the key to understanding the modalities of Queneau's ludic orientation in most instances. In that respect, it can be said that the indeterminacy of "Le Tour de l'ivoire" is paradigmatic. It typifies the way Queneau uses language to make a point about the pointlessness of any attempt to reduce the linguistic sign to a univocal essence.

On careful examination, one discovers that there is not a single piece of creative writing in his entire oeuvre in which he does not engage in this argument. In *Les Enfants du limon* (1938), limon stands both for *slime* and for the legacy of the *Limon family*, in *Saint Glinglin* (1948), the concept suggested by the title means both *never* and *always*. In *Zazie dans le métro* (1959), we come to understand that *dans le métro* is, as Roland Barthes pointed out, an "antiphrase," since the subway is on strike and the heroine does not get to ride in it. In "Le Chant du Styrène" (1959), *styrène* means both *styrene* and *Siren*, in *Le Vol d'Icare* (1968), *vol* is used both in the sense of *theft* and in the sense of *flight*. In *Petite cosmogonie portative* (1950), *cosmogony* is both the positive, forward oriented, generative process based on the genetic model implicit in the etymology of the term (gonos = semen) and an entropy: biological processes represented as regressions, matter evolving toward inertia like the lava and pumice produced by volcanoes (2ème Chant, vv. 136–52).[13] Thus by the "alchemy" operating on the linguistic level, a space of play is kept wide open, where the ontological status of material things, both living and nonliving, is never fixed: Mercury is both a god and an element in the periodic table. Monocellular life springs forth from crystals, and, conversely, the formation of crystals is seen as resulting from the decline of life. Diamonds come into being in a manner analogous to the formation of pearls from pathological secretions (2ème Chant, vv. 138–45).

Reminiscent of the chiasmatic formulations of Heideggerian logic, the ramifications of this argument are evident in every phase of the process engaging the linguistic models that identify Queneau's craft. One could say that, though diffuse and unsystematic, the impulse is to dramatize the Heideggerian frustration encountered in the chimerical pursuit of the essence of being. Pervasive in every scheme, or system of signification, in the shorter texts and in the longer ones, at the level of the sentence and at the level of the constructed paradigm, this driving force has an effect of such proportions that its implications must be

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assessed in the context of the broad philosophical issues that are debated today in the endless search for a creditable theory of literature.

There are two types of texts in Queneau's oeuvre that seem fairly distinct in terms of this perspective. They are worth examining separately since they offer distinctly different clues. In one type we find those that constitute arguments on the notion of play by the very explicitness of ludic ostentation with which they confront the reader from the outset. The format of each work is based on a game plan and the reader is expected to enter into it knowingly. *Exercices de style* (1947), *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (1961), and *Un conte à votre façon* (1967) are well-known works of this type. In another type we find more conventional constructions, in nonludic formats, consistent with recognizable literary genres. In the works of this latter type, Queneau's arguments proceed from positions that reflect an almost incredible degree of assimilation of philosophical discourses, particularly those of Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Freud, and lead into a domain of burning questions of linguistic theory that Queneau experts, as of this date, have not even begun to explore. Most of the author's longer texts are in this category. *Les Enfants du limon*, *Saint Glinglin*, and *Petite Cosmogonie portative*, which I propose as illustrations, are certainly among those in which Queneau's arguments can be studied in their widest implications, but I could have chosen others just as easily, including any of the author's major accomplishments, from *Le Chiendent* to *Les Fleurs bleues* (1965), or from *Zazie dans le métro* to *Le Vol d'Icare*.

In *Exercices de style*, a banal episode involving two characters meeting on a bus and later at the Saint-Lazare train station is repeated in ninety-nine variations. The rules of the game are the following: using a minimum of anecdotal material the author selects a distinct, traditional style as an arbitrary constraint, and then proceeds to develop a text that forces this material to become a presence, affirming a degree of efficacy of the corresponding style. The exercise certainly has the aspect of the work of a musician who explores variations on a theme. Michel Leiris is perfectly justified in speculating that in this endeavor Queneau was inspired by Bach's music.[14] It can be seen as an activity that tests capacity through use of generative devices that are minimally functional but certainly attention-grabbing, and not always at the expense of comprehensibility. But whether this analogy gives it the force of a legitimate linguistic activity is questionable. Is it really an exercise? Does it really test anything? Does it pass the test of its own validity?[15] Ultimately the test of legitimacy becomes decisive in any grant of human value to the exercise as such.

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An accomplished polymath and an encyclopedically minded thinker, Queneau was clearly ahead of his time in his grasp of this issue. His own criteria for the validity of endeavors that are undertaken to assault fads or tribal conventions have more merit these days than they could ever be credited with in the 1930s. It is not without significance that the question of "legitimacy" becomes pivotal in current thinking on Western models of discourse and that it is a crucial concern in the ongoing debate on the homogeneity and heterogeneity of rules in language games.[16] The lack of consensus as to whether language games are isomorphic or not continues to this day, almost twenty years after the dissemination of Lyotard's astute assessments. What the exercise affirms ultimately in Queneau's case is the sovereignty of the game over both the anecdotal material and the selected styles. The language game is an end in itself. By inference, then, the Being of literature itself is asserted as a space of play.

A more obvious attempt at constructing a text on the model of a game is found in the author's less known tale, *Un conte à votre façon*. This is a short text and by no means an occasion for fascinating reading. In that respect, it represents a confirmation of the general rule that governs this type of ad hoc production of text, with a calculated, programmed permutational capacity announced in advance, and in which, as Genette pointed out, quality is sacrificed.[17] The game Queneau invents in this case might be more appropriate as entertainment for children. Here too the emphasis is on the potential of permutations. The anecdotal core is even more trivial than that of *Exercices de style*. The narrative possibilities lie in combinations of three "stories": the story of the three peas, the story of the three poles, and the story of the three shrubs. *Trois alertes petits pois, trois minces grands échalas*, and *trois moyens et mediocres arbustes* suggest a potential for a fable or an allegory, yet the author leaves the responsibility for a reasoned development to the reader. The reader is guided by means of explicit prompts, to construct a variety of short "tales":

> "1. Do you wish to know the story about the three swift little peas?
> If so, go to 16.
> If not, go to 3.
> 2. Do you prefer the one about the three slim, tall poles?
> If so. . . ."[18]

The anecdotal complexion of each tale is thus determined by the reader, who chooses between alternative, possible plots. Since obeying the prompts leads to constructions that are nonsensical, this little

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pochade reveals no conceivable motivation other than the joy of playing.[19]

A unique example of this type of text is also *Cent mille milliards de poèmes*, Oulipo's first manifesto. The printed text has the appearance of a mere collection of ten sonnets. What makes it extraordinary though is the fact that, as the title indicates, it offers its readers not ten, but a hundred thousand billion sonnets. The ten sonnets visible in the book are written in such a way as to allow an astronomical number of permutations. Each line being a complete semantic unit, the reader can generate new poems by replacing any of the fourteen lines of any sonnet by any other line selected at random anywhere in the corpus of the base text. Thus the number of the "derived" sonnets added to the original ten "seminal" ones may give a total of a hundred thousand billion poems. As the author noted during an interview with Georges Charbonnier,[20] the text conceivable as the product of these permutations, when all possible operations are exhausted, is a work of literature but one that cannot be read by any one individual reader in one lifetime (according to Queneau's estimate the book would contain enough material for 200 billion years of reading!). The implications of the ludic orientation in this case are of course dizzying. The emphasis on the ludic formulation brings to the fore the notion of potentiality as an essential characteristic of literature. Thus the ontological status of literature is implied as a space of aphoristic wastelands, a space of unresolved indeterminacy.

The inferences that can be drawn from the instances cited above can be understood fully and accurately only if they are weighed on the same scale as those in which the manifestations of the ludic impulse are far less direct or explicit. Most of the author's best-known works are in this latter category. What they have in common is that they are arguments emphasizing the primacy of the ludic configuration in the construction of the linguistic object at the expense of value systems that derive their force and validity from a broad base of dogma identified nowadays, by consensus, in postmodern terminology, as Western metaphysics.

In *Les Enfants du limon*, the ludic disposition is far from obvious in the form of the narrative text. But the same unmistakable impulse guides the predominant, sustained generative process. It conditions the production of fiction to such an extent that it ultimately determines the meaning of the novel exclusively in terms of the process. The openness of the thematic developments that constitute a systematic play on the concept of *redemption* is the essence of the argument and its only object.

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The fiction generated in this book can be summarized as a series of attempts to salvage a set of values. It can be said that these attempts fail and succeed at the same time. It can also be said that they are of the type that can neither succeed nor fail, and that they are significant in themselves. There is no redemption for the progeny of Jules Limon. The projects undertaken by the various members of the three groups related to Limon by blood or marriage are brought to conclusions that emphasize a state of fallenness, a state of general decadence. Business schemes intended to salvage the value of used paper by recycling it, conceived by Astolphe, fail. Political and ideological activism shaped into a movement of socialist reform proves too utopian and disintegrates. Chambernac's project to compile and publish an encyclopedia and anthology of nineteenth-century marginal thinkers, eccentrics, and cranks intended to "recuperate" the so-called *fous littéraires*, also fails.

In the end the manuscript he tries to publish is rejected by all the publishers who consider it. A possibility of success, and therefore of redemption, is also implicit in the conclusion of the book, given the fact that Chambernac's manuscript is handed to another writer, the novelist Queneau, who will publish it as fiction. However, the development in which Queneau introduces himself as a fictional character in his own novel has only the effect of reemphasizing the lack of "seriousness" inherent in Chambernac's venture. The only value that seems salvageable in the end is the value of the ludic space. Analogical relations contribute only to preserve the dominance of the ludic structures: true science and false science, legitimate children and illegitimate children, authentic texts and unauthentic texts, are all objects of arguments that are left inconclusive, thereby leaving the question of values in a state of suspense.

Similarly, in *Saint Glinglin*, the allegorical thematization of the anecdotal material ultimately becomes an end in itself, a ludic combinatorial exercise asserting the validity of the process on one level as the alibi that legitimizes an ontological impasse on another. The themes that appear intended to implicate scientific issues in sociology, ethnology, cultural anthropology, and psychoanalysis are treated in such a way as to subvert the cognitive value that legitimizes the corresponding scientific discourses. The impulse to dialecticize myths of Western civilization as well as its scientific discourses by subjecting them to colliding juxtapositions makes the concept of play the only intelligible principle in the organization of the basic argument in this case. Thus the succession of the dry by the rainy seasons, of chaos by order, of

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nature by culture, of authority by transgression, of the rule of the father by the revolt of the son, are thematic developments that are kept in an uninterrupted dialectic movement in order to keep the space of play open and prevent ontological fixity. There is no causality. The play that prevents the finality of binary determinations is its own justification.

And finally, the impulse for the ludic organization in the linguistic object is manifest in an almost identical confrontation of scientific and poetic discursive idioms in *Petite cosmogonie portative*. Clearly by the nature of the project implied by the title, by the attempt to invent a formula for a cosmogony, by the choice of dated literary conventions in the organization of the text—Alexandrine verse and six cantos—this is a classic case of a text that provokes the question: is the author serious? What the reader discovers is that for those who are willing to play, paradoxically, Queneau is as serious as he has always claimed to be. Reading this poem is a haunting experience. The discursive treatment of scientific and literary concepts is kept to an incredible minimum: the rules of syntax become chaotic so as to suggest chaotic, random transformations in the physical universe. The duality (object/subject) all but disappears. The earth gives birth to itself! The oneness of the linguistic sign and the oneness of the material universe are thrust against each other relentlessly, never achieving a permanent fusion, never remaining totally apart. Life springs forth spontaneously, a crystal gives birth to a virus. The universe evolves from a single atom to machine intelligence. Anything possible in the material universe is presumed possible in the linguistic order and vice versa. Poetry becomes science and science poetry, in an almost hallucinatory juxtaposition of the two modes of signification assumed by the two types of discourse. In the confrontations staged for this breathtaking ritual the notion of play is asserted as cognition, and the ontology of cognition represented as the ontology of play: cognition contemplated both as origin and as telos.

Whether in texts designed with explicit game plans pointing to themselves as points of departure, or in texts where the ludic activity is discernible only at the turns of discursive itineraries, Queneau's practices encompass unusual theoretical extremes and suggest perspectives where play metaphors cease to be relevant as a general explanation of cultural activity. When all is said, clearly Queneau's arguments go far beyond the perspectives of social scientists such as Huizinga or Caillois. Even more clearly, they go beyond the deterministic accounts of ludic behavior which have been predicated on the Freudian hypothesis of the unconscious. They also go beyond Wittgenstein's descriptions of linguistic practice so much talked about these days. The latter's concept

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of "language game" with its irreducible pluralistic character describes inter-subjective exchanges in a social context, in the real world, and presupposes a nonlinguistic context. Language can function only in the life of a collectivity as an indeterminate number of "language games," the rules of which make it function only to the extent that they are adhered to by the locutors involved. But by insisting on the pluralism of "language games" Wittgenstein loses sight of the unity of language, of the oneness of the being of language.

Queneau's meditation on the use of language is more akin to the Heideggerian quest, focused on the destiny of being, on the essence of being as movement in time.[21] Queneau moves away from the Hegelian notion that the real is the rational.[22] In addressing the question of rules and compliance with rules he assumes the context of a fallen world. Even in a fallen world, there are two sides to the thinking of play, as Derrida observed in a pertinent analysis of Lévi-Strauss. One is "the saddened, negative, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauistic side." The other is "the Nietzschean affirmation, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin."[23] The totality of being is possible to contemplate only in an "ontology of play," where the real that is rational and the real that is madness—a condition in which we lose our certainties about language and about the rules of language games—must coexist side by side. In Queneau, the ludic attitude must be understood as a brand of wisdom accessible concurrently with the consciousness of rupture, in the aftermath of the death of God and of the death of the last man and of the death of history.

In some ways, Queneau's ludic configurations suggest a frame of mind very similar to the tormented conscience of Georges Bataille, whom he knew personally and whose preoccupation with what he called *l'expérience intérieure*, is also a meditation on the concept of play. Understood as a *brèche béante*, a space opened through the abolition of the object/subject dichotomy, Bataille's concept is thinkable as a state of "sovereignty," in an experience that has "no concern or end other than itself."[24] In his well-known quest for a realm of consciousness beyond the experience of limits, a quest that guides him through a breathtaking demolition of Hegel, the ludic attitude has the haunting strangeness of the Nietzschean urge. It is in the state of mind of those who play "naively," "from overflowing power and abundance," with everything that is holy, untouchable, or divine.[25] As he reiterated in his analysis of Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, it is only by pushing seriousness to its limit that

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thought can liberate itself.[26] In Queneau's ludic paradigms, the orientation is toward an absolute of a similar nature. It is toward the purity of the pleasure of playing. Much like the activity of the child playing a board game in Heidegger's now classic metaphor for time, the ludic models constructed by Queneau enable us to contemplate a condition one might say is the very kingship Heraclitus had in mind, in the example of the child-king that Heidegger found so attractive.[27]

[1] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. 119.

[2] Beyond the historical, anthropological, and sociological perspectives of pioneers like Huizinga, Mauss, or Caillois, current probes bear witness to the coming of age of an "epistemology of play," one that assumes its irreducible complexities, despite added strengths derived from linguists like Saussure and Benveniste, psychologists of Freudian inspiration like Guitton or Winnicott, psychologists of non-Freudian orientations like Chateau or Piaget, philosophers like Wittgenstein and Fink or Heidegger and Derrida among many others.

[3] Among those who addressed the issue more or less directly, Jean-Marie Klinkenberg explores a general historico-philological perspective in an article that is somewhat too reticent both in exegetic initiatives and in value judgments ("Jeu et profondeur chez Raymond Queneau," *Ecritures 67*, 1967, pp. 45–52), whereas Allen Thiher ventured somewhat further into the philosophical implications of the ludic in his *Raymond Queneau* (Boston: Twayne, 1985), particularly the chapter titled "Cosmological Visions and Other Games" and the "Conclusion."

[4] In addition to numerous anecdotes recounted casually at Queneau colloquia and recorded in the publications of the respective proceedings, autobiographical books like Marcel Duhamel's *Raconte pas ta vie* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1972) and Jean Piel's *La Rencontre et la différence* (Paris: Fayard, 1982) are also fairly reliable sources of information about Queneau's private life.

[5] Raymond Queneau, *Bords* (Paris: Hermann, 1963), pp. 135–37.

[6] "Poe et l' 'analyse'," *Bords*, pp. 69–80.

[7] In a striking, unpublished, letter addressed to Jean Piel and dated August 7, 1923, Queneau seems already preoccupied with poetry as play and wonders whether a poem could be compared to a game of solitaire (Piel, *La Rencontre et la différence*, p. 65).

[8] Cf. Thiher, *Raymond Queneau*, particularly the second chapter.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[11] Raymond Queneau, "L'humeur et ses victimes," in *Le Voyage en Grèce* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 81.

[12] "Il faut maintenir la non-gratuité de l'art. Simplement bien faire, c'est réduire l'art au jeu, le roman à la partie d'échecs, le poème au puzzle. Il ne suffit pas de dire, ni de bien dire, mais il faut que cela vaille d'être dit. Mais qu'est-ce qui vaut d'être dit? La réponse ne peut être évitée: ce qui est utile." (Queneau, *Le Voyage en Grèce*, p. 94)

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[13] My references are to the revised version of this text (Raymond Queneau, *Chêne et Chien* suivi de *Petite cosmogonie portative* [Paris: Gallimard, 1969]).

[14] Michel Leiris, *Brisées* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1966), p. 244.

[15] Klinkenberg characterizes the whole venture as a game, but he also sees it as partially escaping from that status and acquiring a supplementary dimension: "*Exercices de style* is nothing but a game, yet, at the same time, it constitutes a veritable reflection on the act of writing and on the relativity of language" (*Ecritures 67*, p. 48).

[16] Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne* (Paris: Minuit, 1979), p. 107.

[17] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), pp. 49–62.

[18] "1. Désirez-vous connaître l'histoire des trois alertes petits pois?
Si oui, passez a 16.
Si non, passez a 3.
2. Préférez-vous celle des trois minces grands échalas?
Si oui. . . ." (Raymond Queneau, *Contes et propos* (Paris, Gallimard, 1981), p. 223)

[19] Interestingly, Butor's *6810000 litres d'eau par seconde*, which appeared two years earlier and is also constructed on a ludic model, does not seem to have inspired or in any way influenced Queneau. Butor's design goes a long way beyond the gratuitousness of a game and becomes a vehicle to an ambitious research project, as the subtitle, *étude stéreophonique*, indicates. (Cf. Georges Charbonnier, *Entretiens avec Michel Butor* [Paris: Gallimard, 1967], p. 144 and *passim*; also Genette, *Palimpsestes*, pp. 62–64).

[20] Raymond Queneau, *Entretiens avec Georges Charbonnier* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p. 111.

[21] A sketchy account of some Heideggerian "themes" is offered by Claude Simonnet in his *Queneau déchiffré* (Paris: Slatkine, 1981), pp. 100–03. Unfortunately, no systematic study of Heidegger's influence on Queneau's thinking has been attempted as of this date.

[22] Queneau is at home with the history of Hegelianism in France and has a perfect grasp of not only the implications of the "rationalizing reductionism" by which Marxist interpretations of Hegel's dialectics dominated French philosophy through the 1930s but also the subtle nuances of the Kojevian Hegel, "the Hegel of absolute and circular knowledge," the Hegel who leads to Heidegger (see "Premières confrontations avec Hegel," *Critique* [août-sept. 1963], 694–700).

[23] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 292.

[24] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 18.

[25] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 9.

[26] Cf. "Sommes-nous là pour jouer ou pour être sérieux?", *Critique*, 52 (sept. 1951), 748.

[27] The original source to which this notion is usually attributed is Heraclitus' Fragment 24 ("Eon pes esti pezon, pessevon; pedos i vassilii").

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Fragments of Redemption: Reading William Gaddis' *JR*

Gregory Comnes

In *JR* the expression "agapē agape" does more than entitle character Jack Gibbs's unfinished work; it underscores the conditions that frame the basic question William Gaddis' second novel poses to both its characters and readers, "what's worth doing": how the recovery of meaning and value is possible, at what cost and by what means, within the morally bankrupt and socially entropic landscape the novel presents.[1] Answering this question is difficult, especially when one realizes that Gaddis gives no warrant for belief in conventional aesthetic solutions. The plot line of *JR* consists of a conflict between two subtexts—finance and art. In the corporate world of *JR*, where all monetary worth exists on paper, the shadow of paper instruments has so obscured traditional value structures that depreciation has become the touchstone of worth. Gaddis is not simply offering commonplace moralizing about the evils of money, however, since the distorted relationship between means and ends in *JR* is not only monetary but aesthetic. Artists talk incessantly about projects that would redeem their world from venality, but these same artists fail to produce anything worth doing, anything that would confer credibility upon their intentions.

Gaddis not only critiques conventional aesthetic solutions within the novel; he sets this critique in a narrative form that dramatizes it. What the novel says about art is mirrored by how the novel says it, issuing forth a "form" that intractably resists conventional aesthetic means of interpretation. *JR* makes no concessions to fictional continuity; its linguistic patterns never assume narrative coherence because the conventions used to signify such patterns are absent. The novel is 726

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pages of unmediated dialogue: there are no chapters, no paragraphs, and very few complete sentences. Its prevailing mark of punctuation—the ellipsis—emphasizes the absence of explicit interchange, as unidentified speakers are inevitably interrupted by other voices competing for the same space on the page. Because *JR* neither describes locale nor provides discursive transitions, scenes are not set in the novel; they occur, while the identification of topics, never mind their relative significance, is left totally to the reader. As it does through the content, the form of *JR* continuously reminds its readers that they will be frustrated so long as they rely on conventional aesthetic means of recovering meaning from it.

Because *JR* offers so little in the way of structural coherence and narrative line, one can sympathize with George Steiner's complaint that "this unreadable book will humiliate, confound, and mock the reader"—sympathize, but not agree.[2] In contrast to Steiner's premise that the unconventional narrative mocks the reader, I would argue that Gaddis creates his "unreadable" text to instruct the reader, to teach him through unconventional narrative how to understand in an unconventional way "what's worth doing."

In *JR* both the method and the message of this instruction emerge through the oblique allusions the novel makes to Walter Benjamin. In his reflections on culture and tradition Benjamin mirrored Gaddis' belief that in a society dominated by capitalistic institutions the power of art to redeem worth had eroded: the secular cult of beauty and the authenticity of the cultic art work to present it were irrelevant in a world Benjamin saw as a "phantasmagoria" of historicism and the bland culture of progress, a deceptively connected superstructure of "worth" built on the debris and rubble of traditional cultural value.[3] But while Benjamin renounced what he called the "auratic" nature of art, its status as a unique work that could present truth *apart* from the state and society, he did not reject the role of the artist.[4] Embedded in the ruins of modern culture were "thought fragments" of truth that survived the perils of progress.

In this context the role of the author became that of an "archaeologist of ruins," one whose task was to excavate these fragments, "to wrest the elements of a work from their false context and to reconstruct them in a new one in such a way that the original hidden truth of the work is revealed."[5] Benjamin described this procedure as "politicizing aesthetics," a procedure that did not involve the contemplative artist reassembling value outside society, but the collaborative artist exploiting society's means of production, subverting false

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structures by illuminating truth through fragments which themselves remained unconnected, ever open to new possibilities of disclosure. In Benjamin's modern world of commodity fetishism, worth no longer exists in the inherent value of the aesthetic object, since the object itself is described by Benjamin as not "in truth."[6] Instead, aesthetic "worth" becomes synonymous with and contingent upon the responsible action of the artist who recovers and displays these fragments: "what's worth doing" becomes in large part the doing itself.

To convey this idea to its reader, *JR* does not preach Benjamin's ideology; instead Gaddis moves the reader from abstract to concrete understanding of this unconventional aesthetic by requiring him to "politicize the aesthetics" of the novel: to *use* this view as the means of recovering narrative meaning. Because *JR* molds its language to reflect Benjamin's phantasmagoric world of depreciated value within which are embedded fragments of truth, the reader discovers this method as he works out the linguistic perplexities he encounters, attesting to its tenets by actively engaging in the novel to excavate meaning from it.

Reading *JR* leaves little doubt that any excavation of worth requires diligent spadework; almost every contextual and structural occurrence in the book is littered with the debris of depreciated and distorted values, both financial and artistic.

Throughout *JR* the distortion of worth by financial community is symbolized by paper money, a symbol present from the opening lines of the novel:

> —Money . . .? in a voice that rustled.
> —Paper, yes.
> —and we'd never seen it. Paper money.
> —We never saw paper money till we came east.
> —It looked so strange the first time we saw it.
> —Lifeless.
> —You couldn't believe it was worth a thing. (p.1)

These lines suggest two attitudes toward what historians refer to as "the paper money complex."[7] The first attitude acknowledges an important point in the debate about the relative worth of coined versus paper money, specifically that paper money was only a symbol, counted for nothing as a commodity, and was thus rightly judged to be the "worthless" material Edward Bast's aunts deem it to be.[8] In the traditional economic system of commodity exchange, two types of money, paper and gold, are clearly disassociated, and it is only the imagination of the capitalist that turns paper "sign" into a valuable substance.[9]

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The transference of money's power from the realm of commodity to the realm of the capitalist's imagination is reinforced in the lines' allusion to a modern version of Wagner's *The Rhinegold*, one in which commercial paper has replaced the ring of the Nibelungs as the source of societal regeneration. To understand this second allusion, the reader must recall that the opening bars of *The Rhinegold* consist of a prolonged E-flat in the lower orchestral register, a sound, Wagner told Liszt, which embraces "The beginning and end of the world."[10] The source of the E-flat and Wagner's concept of how that tonic might manifest itself in future generations are most revealing to the present discussion of the status of paper money in *JR*. Wagner's account of his mental state when the inspiration for the E-flat motif came to him is as follows:

> I suddenly experienced a feeling as if I were sinking in swiftly flowing water. Its *rustling* [italics mine] noise soon presented itself as the musical sound of the E-flat major chord ceaselessly rocking away in broken figures; these broken figures showed themselves as melodic passages of increasing movement, but the pure E-flat major triad never changed and seemed to wish to give the element in which I stand infinite significance.[11]

Later in life Wagner addressed another power that he also felt to be protean in its manifestations:

> Though much that is ingenious and admirable has been thought, said, and written concerning the invention of money, and of its value as an all-powerful cultural force, nevertheless the curse to which it has always been subject in song and story should be weighed against its praises. There gold appears as the demonic throttler of mankind's innocence; so too, our greatest poet [Goethe] has the invention of paper money take place as a devil's trick. The chilling picture of the spectral ruler of the world might well be completed by the fateful ring of the Nibelung as a stock portfolio.[12]

In *JR*'s world the fundamental "rustling chord" Wagner describes is now the rustling voice of paper money described by Bast's aunt; paper money, as Wagner predicted, has become the new "Ring." Similar references to a Wagnerian landscape transformed into a capitalistic Valhalla appear throughout *JR*, Wagner's theme of the consequences of renouncing spiritual love for power functioning as the scaffolding for the events in the novel. However, in contrast to Wagner's conception of greed as a privation of love, a privation that is doomed to failure, the greed in *JR* is Manichaean in its manifestations and appears to have thus avoided the *Götterdammerung*, the fate that Wagner predicted for a world bereft of love. To this extent, the *Ring* motif in *JR* is less Wagner's

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and more G. B. Shaw's. As Shaw pointed out in *The Perfect Wagnerite*, he considered the catastrophic close of Wagner's *Ring* an "operatic anachronism."[13] In contrast, Shaw's modernized scenario has Alberich rethink his threat to dethrone Wotan. Instead, Alberich marries into the best Valhalla families and restores his self-respect by succeeding on such a grand scale that he is transformed into a "Krupp of Essen or Carnegie of Homestead," the type of capitalist that Shaw believed would save Europe.[14]

In sum, the ideological significance of the opening lines of the novel combines the tendency of paper money to distort man's natural understanding of the relationship between symbol and value with the idea of a capitalistic Alberich who succeeds in a world without love to suggest that in this novel the world of finance has transcended the conventional demands and limits of society.

In *JR*, economic rights are anterior and independent of social ones, the symbol no longer needing justification before a moral tribunal. Capitalists who see things "from a corporate level" (p. 23) do not confuse monetary and moral purpose, a point brought home by the repeated allusions to excrement in the novel. The fact that most business deals in *JR* are conducted in or near toilets and that the prototypical tycoon JR has for his leitmotiv the phrase "Holy Shit" quite deliberately points to Freud's notion of the fetishistic connection between money and feces. With a backward glance to Gaddis' punning point in *The Recognitions* that reality *is* Recktall Brown, Gaddis uses money as "Holy Shit" to remind the reader that corporate success involves accepting the pathological and destructive nature of money and acting on it, disregarding any attempt to justify the activity of making money in any moral sense. Free of any sense of social obligation that would involve restriction or sacrifice to a higher good, the corporate world dissolves moral principles into a choice of expediencies. This is the world bereft of love, the world in which moral belief is absent and economic "shitting" is the only operant force.

To be sure, the consequences of these perverted values are horrific and absurd: the use of radioactive cobalt to make "improved" heads for beer (p. 435), recycling of condoms as flutes in pianos (p. 532), and selling of toy weapons to an African revolutionary army that results in its annihilation (p. 709). The corporate world is pathological and destructive, Gaddis shows us, because it has totally separated itself from any moral "commodity" that might restrict its growth. Despite its corrupt nature, however, JR's corporate sensibility is a palpable source of power in contemporary society, and to restore any sense of human

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value or higher purpose to this society, it becomes clear that this moral bankruptcy must be confronted. In *JR* the task of confronting the perversions of corporate America is given to the artist; however, he is not up to the task.

To depict the failure of art, Gaddis continues to draw from the *Ring*, cataloging individual artists as failed, reduced versions of Norse gods. The musician Edward Bast is a bast(ard) and so an embodiment of both Siegmund and Siegfried; but instead of doing battle with the forces of darkness, Edward is depicted as a slave of corporate business, managing JR's affairs while at the same time wasting his musical talent on "Zebra Music" promotional films. Tom Eigen, an author who has written a book much like *The Recognitions*, is now creatively impotent, a "writer who's run out of *agapē*" (p. 282), presumably a reference to the love that could restore the ring, while fellow writer Jack Gibbs's constant refrain "God damned" serves as Gaddis' comment on the debased spiritual condition of JR's capitalistic Valhalla. The characterizations of artistic failure are later codified by what Gibbs calls the "*türschluss* [shut door] syndrome beginning to see the doors closing all sad words of tongue or pen to see the same God damned doors Schramm saw closing . . ." (p. 493). Schramm, a painter who commits suicide, becomes the focus of Gaddis' attacks on the sensibility of any artist who gives into the "*türschluss* syndrome," a setting in of a "paralysis of will" (p. 492). As Gibbs describes Schramm's fate:

> Problem what happened he always woke up the same person that went to bed the night before only way he knew it these God damned words going through his head, go to bed know he'd wake up the same God damned person finally couldn't take it anymore, same God damned words waiting for him only thing to do get rid of the God damned container for the thing contained, God damned words come around next morning God damned container smashed on the sidewalk no place for them to. . . . (p. 283)

The deficiency Schramm exhibits is the same inability to act that Eigen experienced, a condition where he "—finally found everything around him getting so God damned real he couldn't see straight long enough to write a sentence" (p. 492). Instead, Schramm, Eigen, and the rest of the artists in *JR* fall victim to searching for something worth doing, something that forever eludes each of them and ultimately destroys Schramm. As Gibbs tells Eigen later in the novel, Schramm's problem wasn't sexual impotence; it was spiritual impotence: "—Christ look, can't you see it wasn't any of that? It was whether what he was trying to

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do was worth doing even if he couldn't do it? Whether anything was worth writing even if he couldn't write it? Hopping around trying to redeem the whole God damned thing" (p. 621).

Schramm's penchant for redemption echoes that of Wyatt Gwyon, the protagonist of *The Recognitions*. However, in *JR*, Thoreau's doctrine of simplifying that was espoused in *The Recognitions* is no longer tenable as a means of salvation in the corporate world; instead the doctrine has been reduced to a slogan of the slithery lawyer Crawley, one who reduces Thoreau's idea to facile advice: "And one word of advice, clear your head and get down to one thing. Hello . . .? Yes simplify Mister Bast. Simplify" (p. 449). Instead of simplifying their world, however, the artists in *JR* are adept only at creating chaos. Unable to combat the venalities of the corporate world, the artists in *JR* perceive themselves to be in an entropic state, a condition in which order, as Gibbs lectures his students, is but a convenient fiction, "simply a thin, perilous state we try to impose on the basic reality of chaos . . . (p. 20). The notion of order as a "perilous condition" is further reinforced when Gibbs complains about how impossible it is to communicate with his ex-wife, a complaint that in fact defines what communication theory calls "informational entropy": "whole God damned problem listen whole God damned problem read Wiener on communication, more complicated the message more God damned chance for errors" (p. 483).[15] The chaotic, entropic world of the artist is concretized by the description of the Ninety-sixth Street flat, an enclave, a haven where these artists retreat, ostensibly to create. The reality of the flat, however, is chaos. Crates of "Mazola #24"—the detritus of one of JR's corporations—sully and obscure the artists' texts. All the manuscripts in the flat—Bast's music, Gibbs's and Eigen's writing—are in states of disrepair. As Gibbs describes this chaos, "there's too God damned much entropy going on" (p. 287).

Jack Gibbs should know, since he gives voice to the clearest expression of how impotent artists are in the face of the depreciation of order. Believing that he has leukemia, Gibbs argues that his cancer extends to language, specifically his book, which remains unfinished after sixteen years of work. As Gibbs describes it, "—it's like living with an invalid real God damned terminal case, keep hoping he'll pick up his bed and walk like the good book says" (p. 248). Four hundred pages later, however, the reader of *JR* realizes that Gibbs's book will remain both an invalid and in-valid, incapable of providing an antidote to the toxins of corporate America.

In so describing his work, Gibbs enacts his preciously romantic

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belief that art cannot flourish in the midst of a chaotic, entropic society. As Gibbs quotes from his book, "all art depends upon exquisite and delicate sensibility and such constant turmoil must be ultimately destructive" (p. 289).

The true reason for this destruction, however, is not the delicate and exquisite nature of art so much as it is the failure of artists in *JR* to recognize that there can be no art until someone makes it, whatever may be the obstacle. The artists intellectualize and complain about the depreciation evident in society, yet keep themselves paralyzed by waiting for "something worth doing" to motivate them.

JR does not confine itself to exposing the weakness of art, however, for while it leaves its characters trapped in a conceptual cul-de-sac, the novel also shows the reader the way out. If *JR* forces the reader to realize that conventional wisdom about the efficacy of art is inadequate, the novel also presents him with unconventional wisdom by providing the reader with the means to change his role from conceptual analyst to experiential participant, a role that teaches him that it is his own collaboration that imparts significance to the text. The first clue is provided by Jack Gibbs's unfinished work entitled ". . . something agape I think it was . . ." (p. 282), or as the reader later discovers, "agapē agape" (p. 604). Gibbs's book "about random patterns and mechanization" (p. 147) is not a novel but "more of a book about order and disorder more of a social history of mechanization and the arts, the destructive element . . ." (p. 244). Gibbs identifies this element as the problem of eliminating failure; democracy's promise, reviving a term used in *The Recognitions*, is "to banish failure to inherent vice" (p. 571): "shoot the God damned piano that's what it's about just told you, player piano play by itself get to shoot the pianist just read it God damn it says it right here, here where the invention was eliminating the very possibility of failure as a condition for success" (p. 604).

To the careful reader, Gibbs's statements suggest several points. Gibbs acknowledges that the theme of his book is explicitly related to Oscar Wilde's notion of the relationship of democracy, technology, and art. Paraphrasing Wilde, Gibbs ironically notes that the "frail human element [which] still abounded even in the arts" was usurped by the "saving grace" of the machine: "deliverance was at hand, born of the beasts with two backs called arts and sciences whose rambunctious coupling came crashing the jealous enclosures of class, taste, and talent, to open the arts to Americans for democratic action and leave history to bunk" (p. 289). The thematic concerns of the agency of the artist and the influence of technology on art also allude, in an oblique way, to two

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works more pertinent to the themes of random patterns and mechanization in the arts, Walter Benjamin's essays "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and "The Destructive Character."[16] The connection is far greater than merely a similarity in phrasing between these titles and what Gibbs's book is about, however, for Gaddis uses Benjamin in *JR* to teach readers how failure *can* function as the necessary precondition for "success," specifically for the recovery of an understanding of "what's worth doing" in *JR*.

Benjamin's status is enigmatic: he is a Marxist critic whose theories, as Christopher Norris describes them, "are rife with contradiction and paradox but freed from the narrowing rationalist dogma" of "enlightened" Marxist thinking, which Benjamin saw drawing a too facile equation between knowledge and progress.[17] Instead Benjamin formulated a fitful kind of Marxism incorporating a "catastrophist" philosophy of history, one where beliefs are kept alive precisely by renouncing progress and history. The present world, Benjamin argues, is lost to truth, for history is always written by the oppressors of true enlightenment. In modernity Benjamin saw the oppressor as capitalism, "a natural phenomenon with which a new dreaming sleep came over Europe and with it a reactivation of mythical forces," in this instance the forces of technology, commodity fetishism, and the distorted social relationships they generated.[18] Like the younger Marx's, Benjamin's aim was "waking the world from its dream about itself." However, what is needed to change this situation is not simply a worker's revolution, as conventional Marxism holds, but a total revolution, a revolution of consciousness.

These tendencies crystallize in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," where Benjamin discussed the impact of technological changes and social transformations on aesthetic perception and the modes of aesthetic production. In modern society Benjamin identified reality as artifice: an amalgam of commodities and architectural construction made possible by industrialization. Benjamin stressed that this artifice *was* Nature, a concrete realization (in concrete) of society's dream rather than simply a reified expression of that dream. In an industrialized world of commodity production art, too, has become a commodity with what Benjamin termed "exhibition" value, the "shock of the new" that was the province of mass-produced art. The socioeconomic realities of the twentieth century had demonstrated to Benjamin the bankruptcy of the aesthetic approach as a means of ideological intervention: the power of money and capitalism being far too pervasive to be transformed by any intellectual love of beauty. But if

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the emergence of the "exhibition" value of art led to a crisis in aesthetic perception, it also left open the possibility for emancipation: freeing art from the realm of shopworn ideas and cathartic experiences to one of critical cultural argument. In such a climate, the task of the artist became not to represent the artifice that had become reality, but to expose to people how and why artifice had become reality.

Benjamin described this as the movement from "aestheticizing politics" (raising the mundane to art, for Benjamin the essence of fascism) to what he termed "politicizing aesthetics," reviving art in the twentieth century by acknowledging its status as a product, then integrating the means of production with human concerns through collaborative activity.[19] As Benjamin writes:

> A writer's production must have the character of a model: it must be able to instruct other writers in their production and secondly, it must be able to place an improved apparatus at their disposal. This apparatus will be better the more consumers it brings into contact with the production process—in short the more readers or spectators it turns into collaborators.[20]

Benjamin's concept of a collaborator, an active agent of transformation, is reinforced when one considers Benjamin's distinction between the nature of knowledge and the nature of truth, a distinction made manifest in terms of how the reader must transform the material presented to him. Knowledge, Benjamin believed, was amenable to systematic statement and theory, a style that required no active participation by the reader. Truth, in contrast, rejected a sequence of ordered presentation, requiring instead a disjunctive, fragmented style with which the reader, as Benjamin wrote, "must stop and restart with every sentence."[21] Benjamin called the technique of presenting the truth in this manner *plumpes denken*, or "crude thought," the utilization of "thought fragments" whose power was "not the strength to preserve but to cleanse, to tear out of context, to destroy the 'illusion of history.'"[22] Benjamin made extensive use of "thought fragments," particularly quotations, but not as conventional illustrations for a text. Instead his intention was to create a text made up entirely of fragments, an intention Theodore Adorno described as "the attempt to abandon all apparent construction and to leave its [the text's] significance to emerge solely out of the shock-like montage of the material."[23] The intent, as Benjamin made clear, was to disrupt: "Quotations in my works are like robbers by the roadside who make an armed attack and relieve the idler of his convictions."[24] Benjamin also stressed the necessary obliquity of these fragments, stating that "the value of fragments of thought is all

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the greater the less their direct relationship to the underlying idea."[25] The key to understanding does not lie with that which is immediately given, but instead in being able "to read what was never written."[26] The reader breaks into the "discontinuous structure of the world to reveal from behind the piles of refuse . . . small material particles that indicate what is essential."[27] This approach, as Benjamin describes it in "The Destructive Character," requires that one break up the world and its "wish-symbols." But, "he reduces what exists to ruins, not in order to create ruins, but in order to find the way that leads through them."[28]

To understand this approach more clearly, consider Benjamin's use of the "thought fragment" technique in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, a sequence of eighteen aphoristic statements that, while nominally pessimistic, can also be read as redemptive parables, what Adorno called Benjamin's goal of presenting "the paradox of the possibility of the impossible."[29] The *Theses* critiques belief in any historical system—including Marxist historical materialism—that equates the goal of history with the end of time. In rejecting teleology as a basis for understanding, however, Benjamin also affirms the messianic belief in the illumination of truth in the moment, an illumination provided by the fragments that compose the *Theses*, wherein theory suddenly stops "in a configuration pregnant with tensions."[30] In such fragmentary configurations one sees the chance, as Benjamin describes it throughout the *Theses*, to "blast" a specific moment of truth from the otherwise banal and homogeneous course of history.

The same concern with fragments also seems to inform Gibbs's writing. Apart from his citations from Wilde, Gibbs exhibits a fascination with epigraphs. Listed on page 486 of *JR* and reproduced below, the thematic link among these epigraphs parallels Benjamin's focus on the dual themes of human desolation and utopian ideals. Gibbs describes the quotations as "mere trash," but Gaddis' purpose of turning the reader into a Benjamin-like collaborator is nonetheless strengthened by their presence. Gibbs asks Amy, "—what are there about a dozen?" (p. 487), but in fact there are eighteen, the same number as in Benjamin's *Theses*. (Although nineteen are listed in *JR*, the fourteenth duplicates the second. Note also that the numbers in brackets and "<" marks on the copy of page 486 [reproduced below] are *mine*, not Gaddis'.) The point is not to compare the two sets of thought fragments directly, but rather to note the possibility of recognizing in *JR* the same formal and thematic concerns found in Benjamin. Quotations in *JR* more directly related to Benjamin's concept of thought fragments are found on page 587, also reproduced here.

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J R

[1] The unswerving punctuality of chance
[2] A bat as a mouse's idea of an angel
How less like anyone we can be than unlike ourselves
[3] A friendliness, as of dwarfs shaking hands, was in the air
The total depravity of inanimate things (E.M. FORSTER)
[4] Taine's 'Le vice d'une femme' as the axis round which everything turns
[5] Who uses whom? (LENIN)?)
[6] Of the soul being set before its Maker hatless, disheveled and free with its spirit unbroken (K. MANSFIELD)
[7] To see clearly and be able to do nothing (HERACLITUS)
[8] ~~As if the roots of the earth were rotten, cold and drenched~~ (KEATS)
[9] Lady Brute: that may be an error in the translation
[10] Growing up as a difficult thing which few survive (HEMINGWAY?)
[11] Life as what happens to us while we are busy making other plans
[12] The melancholia of things completed
[13] His heart yearning towards the defeated enemy now subject, at his free choice, to be spared or killed, and therefore never so lovely (T.E. LAWRENCE)

(See #2) Pascal's being less unlike others than we can be unlike ourselves

[14] Beware women who blow on knots
[15] That a work of art has a beginning, middle and end, life is all middle
[16] There is a saying, if any stranger enquire of the first met of Mann, were it even a child, "Who is here the sheykh?" he would answer him, "I am he" (C.M. DOUGHTY, TRAVELS IN ARABIA DESERTA)
[17] ~~It is true that in the heights of entimentalism I have been cheated into some fine passages, but~~
[18] Gogol's character who in the end became a kind of gaping hole in humanity

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1920

1920 cv. PPC 32, 34, 83, 87 H. 137-9, 143-4

1920
the Sackbut London v1n2 The Pianola as a Means of Personal Expression / Alvin Langdon Coburn
He holds that it is an instrument for the artist, 2hrs practice a day for a year to master it. Its deadliets enemy the mediocre pianist Diff frm gramophone whose records are invariable perfs (pianola's fingers drop 1/2") "the arts must accept the new conditions and make the most of them"

23rd US depression since 1790 (6/11 23) O Little Town of B'hem
That old Irish Mother of Mine
HFord's antiSemitic campaign wcr65ff/K3/H6 Holst's The Planets } Ds
Mah Jongg p17 (depression) Carnival last appearance Elgar 'Enigma' Variations }
RUR (Eng trans 1923)

1920 Lasky had got to Hollywood to combat hostility of dramatic critics & littérateurs toward movies Maeterlinck Maugham Grtrude Atherton EGlyn arrived there in 1920 'It did not take the authors long to discover their presence in Hwood was only windowdressing' they left angry sorry "Maeterlinck's first scenario was 'a charming little tale about a small boy who discovered some fairies. I'm afraid (wrote Mr Samuel Goldwyn) my reactions to it were hardly fairy-like.'" (n 1921? v. VMC)
EGlyn of Valentino: Do you know he had never even though t of kissing the palm, rather than the back, of a woman's hand until I made him do it!

downgrading music ed. standards (democratising) LEM58 - Musician as menace, one-sided ec. LEM63
1,060,858 children between 10-15 in US gainfully employed: mfrng & mech industries 185,337; textiles 54,649 — Acad. ideals 735
B. Gigli debut in Soto's Mefistofele — College Boards too tough, dropped - LEM163
KDKA Pittsburgh first regular radio broadcasting service — & 7 Masters degrees - 167
Dame Nellie Melba sang over radio at Chelmsford Eng, hrd in Persia 5000 miles & US — art for art's sake obsolete - 192
NY Wall st bomb exp WA141 (committed OY59) — 89 music teachers 130, 265 - 198
Sacco-Vanzettiaccused in murder? WA141 also 1921, 27
Ponzi - 144 AF arrest 149 (demonstrations abroad OY60) — Soc. of Fine Arts LEM60
Gaston B. Means joins Justice Dept. AF151 — 1920s - 193a perfectionism passé - 61
employees militantly on Edison, promoted Symph. (see Cabot & Boston) — " music ed 186
'American Plan' (ect open shop, destroy unionism) — " music competitions
total 3411 strikes — Cf. Parlor 203

NYrs day A Mitchell Palmer arrests cmnsts FL140 & union tieins
Reed as a cmnst leadr was indicted in absentia, in Russia in fact where though he tried to get home died age 33 typhus lay in state fr a week in Moscow's trade union center — hurt musicians
top b.s. The Man of the Forest - Zane Grey (Thes Jias 7 Paradise Main Street) / amendment
is voted for first time in 1920 election - helped fast actors, prohibition
Al Capone signs ag with Torrio in Chicago (MI) — as foundation for organized crime OY179-79 e183
Albert patent agreements USPS 73 dial-phone introduced
Eastman film monopoly USPS 275 — ONs Empire Strikes
SKW essay on Fed Sedition Law (p67) — Man o War 2 min 14 1/5 sec
Ford 1a minute KS 42 Ford income KS 284 — 1 3/8 mi stretch - Belmont
Divorce rate 13.4 per hundred marriages OY61 — Chicago White Sox Baltimore
Mayakovsky - another poem to him sold Bd 137 — Chicago theatre strike
prize fighting legalized in NY (Walker) in sanatc)

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The reader finds in Gibbs's notes a mirror of Benjamin's basic themes: socioeconomic upheaval (the Depression, union conflicts, child labor), the failure of traditional art (rejection of artists by film industry), and especially the need to "politicize aesthetics" ("Art for art's sake obsolete"; "the arts must accept the new conditions and make the most of them").

Art is certainly understood to have "exhibition" value in *JR*, a value expressed by Major Hyde when he tells Gibbs where art comes from:

> —Get it? Art? You get it where you get anything you buy it . . . don't try and tell me in this day and age there isn't enough around for everybody great art, pictures music books who's heard all the great music there is you? You read all the great books there are? seen all these great pictures? records of any symphony you want reproductions you can get them that are almost perfect, the greatest books ever written you can get them at the drugstore. (p. 48)

In Hyde's corporate world of perverted values art has become a commodity of "drugstore masterpieces," part of what Gibbs describes as the "God damned Protestant ethic [a reference to Weber's "capitalist spirit"] can't escape it have to redeem it" (p. 477). The means of redemption, as Gibbs tells Amy, requires the type of change Benjamin advocated, a change of contexts: "—I mean sometimes there are situations that just don't seem to have a solution in their own context do you, do you see what I mean? And the only way to, the only thing to do is step in and change the whole context" (p. 496). While Gibbs cannot act on his own advice, his remarks provide important clues to the reader. Since *JR* exhibits the distorted structures and bankrupt values of capitalism described by Benjamin and since the novel resists conventional aesthetic interpretation, the task of the reader is to "blast" from the "bunk" of the novel's encrusted contexts of false value fragments that illuminate an understanding of worth heretofore hidden.

In this context *JR*'s allusions to Hermann Broch's *Sleepwalkers* are revealing (pp. 629, 724). Like Benjamin, Broch believed the role of art was to reveal the means by which man could recover a sense of value in a fragmented world.[31] By radically revising narrative style to mirror discoveries in the new physics, Broch created what he called "epistemological novels," works in which the active participation of the reader in constructing meaning became the primary issue.[32] Jack Gibbs gives voice to this idea when he states "don't bring a God damned thing to it can't take a God damned thing from it don't know something look it up" (p. 605). Ironically, the fact that Jack Gibbs has been reading the

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same page of the *Sleepwalkers* for two hours suggests that he is unable to take his own advice, that he cannot take the responsibility of active participation of narrative construction Broch required. In reading the "epistemological novel" *JR*, the reader faces the same dilemma: either participate in the construction of the text's meaning, or else be condemned to endlessly read *JR*'s "same page" of verbal noise. The allusion to Broch underscores what the allusions to Benjamin point out. Rather than try to "aestheticize" the paper money world of the novel, as the artists of the novel try and fail to do, the reader can "politicize" aesthetics, take art into the world of action by carefully considering oblique allusions—indirect and therefore more valuable—as possible sources for illuminating "what's worth doing" in *JR*.

Examined carefully, *JR* yields a series of intricate connections concerning fragments in the complementary context Benjamin accords them, connections that aid the reader in the understanding and experience of "politicizing aesthetics." For example, early in *JR* there is an expressed concern over an inscription engraved in the front of Gibbs's school. The inscription resists translation, although Gibbs drops some hints to the reader that it might be from Empedocles: "—I think it's a fragment from the second generation of his cosmology, maybe even from his first" (p. 45). The reference to Empedocles seems to satisfy most characters in the novel. Later, however, the reader finds that it was Schepperman the painter who engraved it, an engraving Gibbs describes as one of Schepperman's attempts to make a statement that people could see: "—Schepperman God damned statements still got one of his God damned statements carved in stone over the God damned front door, God damned school board find it's Karl Marx" (p. 409). Disguised by little "curlicues" added to the letters (p. 457), the statement is indeed a fragment, but not from Empedocles. Turning back to the fragments on page 20, if the reader shifts his perspective, he can recognize the obscured letters of "from each according to. . . ." The implications are complex and fascinating.

By first providing a supposed reference to Empedocles, himself a believer in destruction as the precondition for meaning (actual fragments of Empedocles' *Fragments* appear on pages 45, 161, and 406), Gaddis nudges the reader into discovering the real significance of the quotations. The reference to Marxism (from each according to his ability to each according to his need) reminds the reader that systems opposing JR's capitalistic money game *can* exist. More importantly, however, the reference reinforces the significance of Walter Benjamin's "messianic transcience," his vitalist revision of Marxist materialism

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which in the context of reading *JR* means actively engaging the novel's verbal "means of production," taking on fragments such as Schepperman's, fragments that the reader himself must "wrench" into a previously undisclosed context that confers meaning.

This technique is particularly useful when applied to the subject of entropy, which as previously mentioned appears to symbolize a predetermined state of inevitable chaos that permeates both the lives of the artists in the novel and the reader's attempts to structure them. In so viewing such chaos, however, Gibbs, Eigen, and the nonattentive reader miss Gaddis' covert message that entropy is *not* determined, a function of the cosmos, but is instead a result of choices man himself makes about the possibility of order. Two fragments from *JR* corroborate this interpretation of entropy's function in the novel.

First, the name Jack Gibbs must be a reference to Josiah Willard Gibbs, the nineteenth-century American physicist/chemist so beloved and so misunderstood by Henry Adams.[33] Jack Gibbs's negative interpretation of entropy, while in line with Adams' idea of the heat death of the universe, is at odds with Willard Gibbs's own pronouncements on the subject. Specifically, when Willard Gibbs established probability as a fundamental concept of physics, he was not reducing the concept of significant ordered action to the "perilous condition," Jack Gibbs tells his class. Instead, Willard Gibbs revised the relationship between order and disorder, suggesting that "the impossibility of an uncompensated decrease of entropy seems to be reduced to improbability," that irreversibility of increasing disorder was not a given.[34] The clearest explanation of Gibbs's ideas was put forth by scientist E. T. Jaynes. Noting the usefulness of Gibbs's formulations, Jaynes declared "that even at the purely phenomenological level, entropy is an anthropomorphic concept. For it is a proposition, not of the physical system, but of the particular experiments you or I choose to perform on it."[35] Willard Gibbs provided the insight that entropy is not an independent entity threatening man's existence but an anthropomorphic tool, one that offers answers, especially in the application of thermodynamics to chemistry, unforeseen in antecedent theories.

The second fragment concerns the reader's willingness to take seriously Jack Gibbs's suggestion to "read Wiener on communication" (p. 483). "Wiener" is a reference to Norbert Wiener, pioneer in the field of cybernetics, or the theory of codes and their discernment within a state of informational entropy.[36] When Jack Gibbs complains about the possibility of increased error in complicated messages, he underscores the relationship between complexity and unpredictability in communi-

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cation. What Jack Gibbs leaves out is the other side of the coin of information theory: the more recognizable the message the more banal and predictable it is, in effect replacing error with emptiness. More importantly, Jack Gibbs fails to consider what information theory proposes as the way out of this dilemma, the human mind, a point Wiener stresses throughout his work. Through the intermediary of past experience a priori knowledge is available about the message and its symbols. This knowledge generates feedback, something that both reduces the uncertainty of the message and allows new and unexpected interpretations to take place.

As did Willard Gibbs, Wiener sees entropy not simply as an outside force acting on man but as one that includes man as an agent who endeavors to interfere with the natural random order of events. Wiener goes on to equate information and value as what he calls "negative entropy," the motive force in the relationship of man to his environment, for in seeking order and knowledge man is continually trying to establish an otherwise improbable congruence between human ideas and natural events. Because of the possibility of what he called "local enclaves of order," Wiener felt that the randomness associated with entropy was a privation, an Augustinean "organic incompleteness" rather than the "positive malicious evil of the Manichaeans":

> the Augustinean devil, which is not a power in itself, but the measure of our own weakness, may require our full resources to uncover, but when we have uncovered it, we have in a certain sense exorcised it, and it will not alter its policy on a matter already decided with the mere intention of confounding us further.[37]

In presenting entropy as a "thought fragment" which, when placed in a new context, can be understood as something other than an indication of absolute disorder, Gaddis is asking the reader to go beyond the confines of the deterministic action within the text, to stretch the reader's "ability" to meet his "need" and redeem an implausible order within an otherwise entropic novel.

In sum, Gaddis' use of Benjamin in both the form and content of *JR* first provides the sense that art is bankrupt so long as it stands apart from the socioeconomic realities of the world. Second, Benjamin's theory provides a vision of the reader as a collaborator, one who pieces together the fragments of artistic insight in order to circumvent conventional and distorted wisdom about the very possibility of order.

One should not assume that the novel simply replicates a messianic Marxism, however, for Benjamin's "thought fragments" technique ap-

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plies as well to another source of establishing worth buried under the debris of *JR*'s corporate world. Returning again to Jack Gibbs's book as a source for fragments, the careful reader recalls Gibbs's comment to Amy that the book is "—About a lot of things it's can't say what a book's about before it's done that's what any book worth reading's about, problem solving" (p. 499). To solve the "problem" of establishing coherent meaning within *JR*, the reader must examine another "thing" discussed in Gibbs's book, the concept "as another mother country throwback had it, [that] all art does constantly aspire to the condition of music" (p. 289). This reference to Walter Pater's concept of the position of music as the highest art form, together with the opening sentence of Gibbs's book, "Music is free to all" (p. 203), suggest that the reader take Gibbs's ideas about random patterns and relate them to the musical references in *JR*.

In so doing, one finds that it is not true, as one critic put it, that "there is no music in *JR*"; the problem is to discern its tonic and overtones amidst the cacophony the novel presents.[38] The problem is solved if one returns to the Wagnerian fundamental tonic of E-flat, considering it not in its transfigured monetary form that opens the novel, but in its original state which can effect a kind of Keatsian "negative capability" in an audience. As Bast tells Amy, "No not asking them making them, like that E-flat chord that opens *The Rhinegold* goes on and on for a hundred and thirty-six bars until the idea that everything's happening under water is more real than sitting in a hot plush seat with tight shoes on" (p. 111).

The means by which one understands the potential transformational power of music as represented by the E-flat tonic is the confusion between Wagner and Mozart in *JR*. As a result of the confusion of instructional tapes at JR's school, the reader hears characters mentioning "Mozart's *Ring*" ("Mozart's Rhinegold" [p. 29]; "Mozart's, ah, *Ring*, is it?" [p. 39]). At first, this confusion seems only to confirm the chaotic and worthless instruction taking place at the school. Investigated more carefully, however, this confusion between the two composers reveals an important linkage concerning how to recover meaning within a chaotic landscape, the concept of *agapē*.

In *Mozart, His Character His Work*, Alfred Einstein notes that Mozart's last opera, *The Magic Flute*, was written in the same E-flat key Wagner used in the *Ring*.[39] By itself, this fact is not extraordinary, since on the surface there seems to be little similarity between Mozart's innocuous libretto about the fortunes of Tamino and Wagner's cosmic myths. However, Einstein goes on to say that E-flat is the Masonic key and that *The Magic Flute* was designed by Mozart as a tribute to the

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ethical tenets of Free Masonry, specifically the concern with the alleviation of man's fear of death by teaching him the selfless, cosmic principle of *agapē*.[40] To overcome the fear of personal extinction that underlies the fear of death, the Masons taught that man should neither deny death nor try to escape its consequences. Instead, one must embark upon a chthonic journey to hell itself, shedding personal concern in order to reach the intellectual illumination that death is nothing to fear because individual identity is not important. This recognition leads one to the condition of *agapē*, a selfless acceptance of the worthlessness of individuality which paradoxically frees one for the experience of living life, not by amassing wealth or holding power, but by giving, by caring for others more than for oneself.

One can now understand the concept of "Mozart's *Ring*" in a new way, as an oblique allusion to the concept of *agapē*. Already conspicuous by its repeated mention in such an otherwise loveless book, *agapē* can now be understood as Gaddis' specific alternative to the greed and inaction present within the novel. With a backward glance at the "Holy Shit" of money, the reader is better able to understand Gaddis' frequent reference to a letter written by Mozart in which he says that "believing and shitting are two very different things" (p. 42). Mozart recognized the necessity of the "shit" of money, as Gaddis reminds us through numerous references to the composer's money problems (pp. 40–42). However, as the letter of Mozart reminds us, belief is a different state, a way of achieving the higher truth dramatized by Mozart's music, so long as one clearly separates belief from greed and the worship of money.

Gaddis does not confine this oblique allusion to Mozart and his work. Within the novel, the reader now has a better understanding of why Gaddis made James, Bast's uncle and a "genius" composer according to the otherwise cynical Gibbs (p. 117), a member of the Masonic order (pp. 11, 62). Genius, music, and *agapē* are equated throughout *JR*. If one explores carefully, one finds that Wagner, the composer mentioned most often in *JR*, shifted his spiritual allegiance from Feuerbachian Eros to Schopenhauerian *agapē*, a belief quite similar to Mozart's: namely, that one reaches illumination through a journey wherein one confronts and lets go of his individuality on the way to a higher state of consciousness.[41] Beethoven, an ardent admirer of *The Magic Flute*, likewise practiced the fundamental tenet of Free Masonry, a belief that informs Gibbs's use of a quotation from the deaf composer that "the better of us keep one another in mind" (p. 290).[42] Even Gibbs's "gloomy" philosopher Empedocles posited *agapē* as the

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principle that musically transforms the strife, the Benjamin-like fragments of the world, into order.[43]

What the oblique allusions to *agapē* share is a cosmic vision. Suffering, randomness, and chaos are the unavoidable conditions of life that can neither be controlled by money nor refined out of existence by art. However, by living according to the selfless principle of *agapē*, one can transform this chaos. The world is entropic, but in the way Willard Gibbs rather than Jack Gibbs suggested: a random system in which order is improbable but not impossible. Faced with the shut door, the *türschluss* syndrome, the reader now has the key to open it.

Armed with this knowledge the reader can now better understand Jack Gibbs's comment that his fellow failed artist Thomas Eigen ("self" in German) had "run out of *agapē*." As Rhoda reminds Bast, Schramm's suicide was not a result of despair. Like the other artists in *JR*, Schramm could not use his aesthetic gift as a means of redemption because he could not get away from his ego: "none of you trust anybody you're all scared shitless of it [passion and intimacy] aren't you, I mean he's so hung up on this book he's scared to lose this lousy opinion of himself that's why none of you can . . ." (p. 606). Gibbs interrupts at this point, but Gaddis' point is made nevertheless. By focusing on the self, Schramm and the other artists in *JR* ironically perpetuate the very tendency of contemporary society to "eliminate failure as the precondition for success" that Gibbs finds so abhorrent. As long as artists remain concerned with avoiding the "failure" of self-destruction, none of them can reach the state of *agapē*, the only state by which the chaos of society can be successfully transformed. The allusions to *agapē* in *JR* provide another means for the reader to become a collaborator, assembling the fragments that refer to *agapē* to transform the apparent narrative chaos of *JR* into meaning.

The ethical tenet that emerges from *JR* is, as Edward reminds the reader, in the doing: "I mean until a performer hears what I hear and can make other people hear what he hears it's just trash" (p. 724). The crux, of course, is to play this music in the no-deposit-no-return world of *JR*, where the possibility of failure to do anything is great.

To insure that any recovery of meaning is contingent upon action the reader takes, *JR* does not totally separate "good" music and "bad" money. The recurring image of the pianola, the "refurbished" larynx of the dead singer (p. 288), together with the graphic equation made between the JR corporate logo, the dollar sign, and the musical clef (p. 536), suggest that money and music can be connected in the corporate world's attempt to "get the God damned artist out of the arts once and

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for all" (p. 288). The pathology of greed, the "shit," as Gaddis reminds us, can be left in the piano (p. 142). What does separate the two subjects, what keeps *agapē* from becoming agape, is man acting, striving to transform fragments into meaning.

[1] William Gaddis, *JR* (New York: Knopf, 1976). All subsequent references are to this text. The phrase "what's worth doing" appears numerous times in the text, uttered by a variety of characters.

[2] George Steiner, "Books: Crossed Lines," *New Yorker*, 26 (Jan. 1976), 106–09.

[3] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn; ed. and with an introd. by Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1973), p. 180.

[4] I am indebted to James L. Rolleston for clarifying Benjamin's dialectical, and often slippery, definition of art. For an in-depth discussion of the subject, see Rolleston's "The Politics of Quotation: Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project," *PMLA*, 104 (1989), 13–25.

[5] David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), p. 226.

[6] Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), p. 103.

[7] See, for example, Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life 1400–1800*, trans. Miriam Kochen (New York: Harper, 1975).

[8] For an assessment of the attacks against the institution of paper money, see Vernon L. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought* (New York: Harcourt, 1954), pp. 532–41.

[9] For a relevant discussion, see Marc Shell, *The Economy of Literature* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978).

[10] Quoted in L. J. Rather, *The Ring of Self-Destruction: Wagner's* Ring *and the Modern World* (Baton Rouge, La.: Thompson-Shore, 1977), p. 135.

[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 135–36.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 175.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 161.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 162.

[15] For an excellent discussion of information theory, especially its relationship to the arts, see Abraham Moles, *Information Theory and Esthetic Perception*, trans. Joel E. Cohen (Urbana, Ill.: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1966).

[16] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, pp. 219–53; Walter Benjamin, "The Destructive Character," in *Reflections*, trans. and ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Shocken Books, 1986), pp. 301–03.

[17] Christopher Norris, "Image and Parable: Readings of Walter Benjamin," *Philosophy and Literature*, 7 (Apr. 1983), 17.

[18] Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity*, p. 231.

[19] Benjamin's distinction between the aestheticizing of politics and the politicizing of aesthetics runs throughout "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

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[20] Walter Benjamin, "The Artist as Producer," in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: New Left Books, 1973), p. 98.

[21] Julien Roberts, *Walter Benjamin* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), p. 167.

[22] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 39.

[23] Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity*, p. 188.

[24] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 37.

[25] Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity*, p. 214.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 213.

[27] Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," *Reflections*, p. 336.

[28] Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity*, p. 189.

[29] Roberts, *Walter Benjamin*, p. 200.

[30] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, pp. 255–66; p. 264.

[31] For an explanation of Broch's concern with ethics rendered through experimental narrative, see Theodore Ziolkowski, *Hermann Broch*, Columbia Essays on Modern Writers, ser. 3 (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1964); Theodore Ziolkowski, "Hermann Broch and Relativity in Fiction," *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 8, No. 3 (1967), 365–77.

[32] Ziolkowski, *Hermann Broch*, p. 9.

[33] See, for example, Lynde Wheeler, *Josiah Willard Gibbs* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1970). For Adams' misinterpretation of Gibbs, see Ernest Samuels, *Henry Adams, The Major Phase* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 440–48.

[34] Wheeler, *Josiah Willard Gibbs*, p. 81.

[35] E. T. Jaynes, "Gibbs versus Boltzmann Entropies," *American Journal of Physics*, 33, No. 5 (1965), 398.

[36] Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1954). For further discussion on why it is incorrect to interpret entropy as a metaphor of destruction and chaos *only*, see *Entropy and Information in Science and Philosophy*, ed. Libor Kubat and Jirl Zeman (New York: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 350 ff.; Stephen Brush, "Thermodynamics and History," *Graduate Journal*, 7, No. 2 (1967), 477–566; Gerald Holton, "Presupposition in the Construction of Theories," *Graduate Journal*, 5, No. 1 (1965), 87–110.

[37] Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings*, p. 35.

[38] Jay L. Halio, "American Dreams," *Southern Review*, 13 (Autumn 1977), 840.

[39] Alfred Einstein, *Mozart: His Character His Work* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961), p. 465.

[40] For Mozart's understanding of *agapē*, see Jacques Chailly, *The Magic Flute, Masonic Opera*, trans. Herbert Weinstock (New York: Knopf, 1971), esp. "Cosmogony of Libretto," pp. 92–97. For a general introduction to the concept of *agapē*, see Anders Nygren, *Agapē and Eros* (Philadelphia: Western Press, 1953); Gene Outka, *Agapē: An Ethical Analysis* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1971).

[41] Rather, *The Ring of Self-Destruction*, p. 104.

[42] *Ibid.*, pp. 139–42.

[43] Raymond Adolph Prier, *Archaic Logic: Symbol and Structure in Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Empedocles* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), p. 145.

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Tomlinson, Ruskin, and Moore: Facts and Fir Trees

Ruth A. Grogan

Charles Tomlinson is undoubtedly one of England's most distinguished living poets and critics. The accumulated work of four decades—his *Collected Poems* published by Oxford in 1985, his many translations (from Vallejo, Tyutchev, Machado, and Paz, to name only a few), his large body of criticism and memoirs, his exhibitions of graphic work and the three resulting volumes of reproductions—has been accompanied by honors, prizes, and invitations to read and lecture in many countries.[1] As a poet and artist deeply rooted in his native England, and at the same time an internationalist and multilinguist, he lays claim to our closest attention.

Tomlinson has frequently cited John Ruskin, that most English of seers, as a key precursor. Although he was attracted to modern American poets—Williams, Stevens, and Moore among others—well before they were generally known in England, it was only under Ruskin's auspices, a few years later, that he began to integrate their voices into his own. At the back of his reading was always "the sheet anchor of having read Ruskin." Recalling his early response to Marianne Moore, he said, "she has this Ruskinian open-ness to the creative universe in looking at the surfaces it offers one."[2] Wallace Stevens' poetry, on the other hand, had to be resisted despite its allure: "I was arguing for a kind of exactness in face of the object, which meant an exactness of feeling in the writer. It meant that you must enter into a relationship with things, that you must use your eyes. . . . I learned this lesson from Ruskin—chiefly from the evocations of leaves, clouds, water in *Modern Painters*."[3] That Tomlinson continues to find Ruskin's

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prose of inexhaustible interest is witnessed by a recent poem of 1987 entitled "Ruskin Remembered."[4]

A study of the affinities between Ruskin and Tomlinson would have to begin with the eye. Tomlinson has quoted Ruskin's memorable description of the eye as possessing an "intellectual lens and moral retina,"[5] and it is clear that for both writers their delicate, rigorously objective descriptions of cloud, stone, and water arise from the profound conviction that the visual imagination is intimately and inseparably allied to the intellectual and moral faculties. There are strong divergences between them as well. Whereas Ruskin almost always judged art in terms of verisimilitude, and nature in terms of its revelations of divine purpose, Tomlinson is an heir of the early modernist movement, with its concern with collage, discontinuity, and indeterminacy. Tomlinson looks back at Ruskin through the lens of Cézanne.

Though the assimilations and repudiations of Ruskin in Tomlinson's work are complex, in this essay I wish to turn from these larger questions in order to make a study of intertextual minutiae. My focus will be on a cluster of anecdotes and images arising from and centering on two passages of Ruskin's prose, both of them descriptions of fir trees.[6] Over the years traces of these images reappear in Tomlinson's poetry, criticism, reading, and discussions with friends—often, oddly enough, in an American connection. In their intertextual and transatlantic combinations they offer significant insights into the workings of Tomlinson's imagination.

We pick up the trail by going back to November 1956, when Hugh Kenner paid a visit to the Tomlinsons in their (then) home in Somerset. Knowing of Kenner's delight in imaginative factuality, Tomlinson read him a passage from Ruskin:

> There is, perhaps, no tree which has baffled the landscape painter more than the common black spruce fir. It is rare that we see any representation of it other than caricature. It is conceived as if it grew in one plane, or as a section of a tree, with a set of boughs symmetrically dependent on opposite sides. It is thought formal, unmanageable, and ugly. It would be so, if it grew as it is drawn. But the Power of the tree is not in that chandelier-like section. It is in the dark, flat, solid tables of leafage, which it holds out on its strong arms, curved slightly over them like shields, and spreading towards the extremity like a hand. It is vain to endeavour to paint the sharp, grassy, intricate leafage, until this ruling form has been secured; and in the boughs that approach the spectator, the foreshortening of it is like that of a

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> wide hill country, ridge just rising over ridge in successive distances; and the finger-like extremities, foreshortened to absolute bluntness, require a delicacy in the rendering of them. . . .[7]

At this same meeting Kenner gave Tomlinson a gift he had brought along from New York—a copy of Marianne Moore's most recent book of poems, *Like a Bulwark*. It was an appropriate gift, for Tomlinson had been interested in Moore since his undergraduate days, and it was all the more appealing for having been inscribed to Tomlinson in her own hand.

The account of this meeting is in Tomlinson's charming memoir of his transatlantic friendships, *Some Americans*.[8] With a bit of unaccented humor, he adds that the spruce tree must have stuck in Kenner's mind, for it reappeared almost twenty years later in *A Homemade World* (1975), still associated with Marianne Moore. What Kenner claims in this later citation is not that Moore quoted or even knew the passage, but rather that it demonstrates a relation of eye and language that her poems share. The metaphors in Ruskin's description—the arms, shields, hands—are neither personification of the tree nor some sort of recipe for a painter. What we have is "a tree of language, not of nature or of painting: it exists only on Ruskin's printed page. It got there by an effort of attention, commanding the resources of the whole being, that devised and traversed a half-dozen analogies, analogies not for a stolid tree but for a tree's fancied kinetic act, and the eye's act responding."[9] Tomlinson's Ruskin passage prompted Kenner to reflect on the transmutations of visual perception and language and the morality of self-forgetfulness necessary for this accomplishment. It is not surprising, then, that Kenner's comments on Ruskin and Moore should be unintentionally but acutely relevant to Tomlinson as well.

Tomlinson and Kenner were not the first to have given this passage an effort of attention. Another was Graham Hough, whose introduction to Ruskin in *The Last Romantics* (1949) Tomlinson would certainly have read in the early days of his interest in Ruskin. Hough quotes this same "patient and minute study" of the spruce, his purpose being to show how Ruskin trains the eye to overcome perceptual conventions and discover the exquisite repetitiveness of natural form,[10] in this case the way the curves of the foreshortened boughs are echoed in the distant hills. In the following passage from Tomlinson's poetry, the observing eye has assimilated the lessons of Ruskin's common black spruce, though it has carried them to a continent Ruskin never knew and applied them to a different kind of fir:

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Dakota's rock—
the Chinese
predicted
and depicted this
where cream-white
rises into a wall
which pinestems (red)
horizontally of branch
and leaf-mass (rhythmically repeated)
"decorate" is the word.[11]

The discipline of sight, as exercised in Ruskin's description, becomes according to Hough "a morally and metaphysically important occupation." What Ruskin is striving to bring about is nothing less than a "psychological revolution," one that will release the sense of sight "from the bondage to utility and convention and . . . set it free to operate in its own way; he is vindicating the rights of the senses."[12] Behind all of Tomlinson's work, both graphic and verbal, lies the same conviction.

The spruce passage had struck someone else to different effect many years earlier. The unnamed "student of Ruskin" who wrote the introduction to the 1907 edition of *The Elements of Drawing* (a work that Tomlinson has read,[13] and very likely in this popular Everyman edition) also quotes it. He considers it essential to understanding the clearing of the artist's "working vision" which was Ruskin's purpose in *The Elements of Drawing*. But he expands its significance by juxtaposing it with another, apparently contradictory passage. In this second passage Ruskin exhorts his disciple to draw exactly what he sees; but be sure this is what you are doing, Ruskin urges, "for otherwise you will find yourself continually drawing, not what you *see*, but what you *know*." Try drawing the appearance of something a few feet away, books on your bookcase perhaps, or a bit of patterned muslin, or a bank of grass with all its blades, "and you will soon begin to understand under what a universal law of obscurity we live, and perceive that all *distinct* drawing must be *bad* drawing, and that nothing can be right, till it is unintelligible."[14]

Juxtaposing Ruskin's law of obscurity with the careful visual distinctions of the spruce-tree passage is not willful paradox, according to the "student": for clearing the vision means, precisely, recognizing "the illusions and the veracities and the innocences of the eye."[15] Seeing the fir tree means clearing away what you know, or thought you knew, about the fir tree—that Christmas-card fir in one plane, with its "set of boughs symmetrically dependent on opposite sides." In the end, as the

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reader is bound to infer, the clearer the vision, the more it comes up against mystery, not mystical or symbolic or transcendental mystery, but a practical one—one that resides in the limitations of our optical equipment. It marks a point, as Ruskin elaborates elsewhere, at which the painter must abandon the deceptions of mere verisimilitude for the even more difficult tasks of suggesting the optical mysteries of space, mist, design, motion, and infinity.[16]

Ruskin's sense of the artist's double obligation—to see clearly and therefore to see where clarity fails and becomes unintelligible—is undoubtedly one of Tomlinson's major themes. What Tomlinson calls the "double mystery" of sight arises in that "daily experience" of not being able to "make out what precisely it is that one is looking at."[17] It is the subject, to take only one example, of his prose poem called "Skull-shapes":

> Shadow explores them. It sockets the eye-holes with black. It reaches like fingers into the places one cannot see. Skulls are a keen instance of this duality of the visible: it borders what the eye cannot make out, it transcends itself with the suggestion of all that is there beside what lies within the eyes' possession: it cannot be possessed. (*CP*, p. 191)

There are indications throughout this meditation that Tomlinson is transforming his precursor's work to his own ends. Not least of the clues is its reference to "Ruskin's blind man struck suddenly by vision," a parable in *The Elements of Drawing* about the necessity of innocent vision, uncluttered by learned preconceptions.[18] Tomlinson asserts his revisionary rights by quarreling with Ruskin's interpretation. The eye is never innocent, he says. It is always swayed by memory and conception, for "it is what the mind sees."

On the border of what the eye possesses is what the eye cannot possess. In a remarkable poem entitled "The Impalpabilities" (*CP*, p. 88), Tomlinson explores this border area:

> It is the sense
> of things that we must include
> because we do not understand them
> the impalpabilities

The two opposing meanings of "sense"—intuitional and physical—expose the difference between what the senses possess and what they fail to possess, between palpabilities and impalpabilities. As the poem demonstrates, however, the poet does not *banish* the visible or palpable in order to reach the invisible or impalpable; he traces it watchfully,

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meticulously, to its very edge, waiting till it dissolves in the twilight, metamorphoses into something more metaphorical:

> and so the wood
> advances before the evening takes it—
> branches
> tense in a light like water,
> as if (on extended fingers)
> supporting the cool immensity
> while we meditate the strength
> in the arms we no longer see.

The ghost of Ruskin's spruce lingers here. It is not just that there are branches like arms and fingers. A reader who searches for the spruce-tree passage in the original will find it in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, in the chapter entitled "The Lamp of Power"; and will find, moreover, that the Lamp of Power has to do with nobility, majesty, mystery—in a word, sublimity. The Ruskinian context brings us to the surprising realization that the gathering darkness of the wood in Tomlinson's poem, the "cool immensity," the numinous "strength / in the arms we no longer see" constitute a modern version of the sublime.

When Tomlinson first started reading Ruskin, in 1949 or 1950, it was a little volume called *Frondes agrestes*,[19] a selection of passages from *Modern Painters* put together in 1875 by a Coniston friend of Ruskin's. In a rueful footnote added to his friend's selection, Ruskin said: "Almost the only pleasure I have, myself, in re-reading my old books, is my sense of having at least done justice to the pine."[20] The example he pointed to was the following:

> Magnificent! nay, sometimes almost terrible. Other trees, tufting crag or hill, yield to the form and sway of the ground, clothe it with soft compliance, are partly its subjects, partly its flatterers, partly its comforters. But the pine rises in serene resistance, self-contained; nor can I ever without awe stay long under a great Alpine cliff, far from all house or work of men, looking up to its companies of pines, as they stand on the inaccessible juts and perilous ledges of the enormous wall, in quiet multitudes, each like the shadow of the one beside it—upright, fixed, spectral, as troops of ghosts standing on the walls of Hades, not knowing each other, dumb for ever. You cannot reach them, cannot cry to them: those trees never heard human voice; they are far above all sound but of the winds. No foot ever stirred fallen leaf of theirs: all comfortless they stand, between the two eternities of the Vacancy and the Rock; yet with such iron will, that the rock itself looks bent and shattered beside them,—fragile, weak, inconsistent, compared to their dark energy of

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> delicate life, and monotony of enchanted pride—unnumbered, unconquerable.
>
> Then note farther their perfectness. The impression on most people's minds must have been received more from pictures than reality, so far as I can judge, so ragged they think the pine; whereas its chief character in health is green and full *roundness*. It stands compact, like one of its own cones, slightly curved on its sides, finished and quaint as a carved tree in some Elizabethan garden; and instead of being wild in expression, forms the softest of all forest scenery, for other trees show their trunks and twisting boughs; but the pine, growing either in luxuriant mass, or in happy isolation, allows no branch to be seen. Summit behind summit rise its pyramidal ranges, or down to the very grass sweep the circlets of its boughs; so that there is nothing but green cone, and green carpet. Nor is it only softer, but in one sense more cheerful than other foliage, for it casts only a pyramidal shadow.[21]

"When [Ruskin] describes the pine-tree," Tomlinson has commented, "we know that we have never yet looked at one. Poets have realized that this was where to follow Ruskin."[22]

To see how some poets have indeed followed Ruskin we must return to 1949. That year, at about the same time he was reading *Frondes agrestes*, Tomlinson borrowed a copy of Marianne Moore's *Selected Poems* of 1935.[23] It was not an insignificant acquisition, for the two or three Marianne Moore poems, or bits of poems, he had encountered during and since his Cambridge days had begun to act as what he called "talismans"[24] in his imagination. With both books now on his bookshelf, he spotted a link. Two lines of Moore's poem "An Octopus," scrupulously enclosed in quotation marks and with a footnote simply saying "Ruskin," he would have recognized as a slightly revised snippet from the pine-tree passage in *Frondes agrestes*. Here are Moore's borrowed trees:

> austere specimens of our American royal families,
> "each like the shadow of the one beside it.
> The rock seems frail compared with their dark energy of life"[25]

The Moore-Ruskin conjunction remained in Tomlinson's memory until 1969 when he was writing the introduction to a collection of critical essays on Moore. There he cites the lines from "An Octopus" as an instance of her discrimination, her capacity for making out the way a thing looks. She is, he adds, a poet "for whom fact has its proper plenitude."[26] This is an oblique allusion to his own poem "The Farmer's Wife: at Fostons Ash" (*CP*, pp. 70–72), where, in a Ruskinian tribute to

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"fact," to the fecund geography of the farm's lofts, cellars, orchards, and all the blessings they hold and inherit, he says:

> Distrust
> that poet who must symbolize
> your stair into
> an analogue
> of what was never there.
> Fact
> has its proper plenitude
> that only time and tact
> will show, renew.

There are two camps then: the Ruskinian poets, such as Moore, for whom "fact" and "tact" are an aural and conceptual rhyme, and the symbolists, their representative here obviously Yeats.

Fourteen years later, in 1983, the shadowy ghost of the pine tree appears to Tomlinson again, this time while writing a review[27] of Elizabeth Bishop's *Complete Poems*. Her poem "At the Fishhouses,"[28] contains the Ruskin particle in a different setting:

> Back, behind us,
> the dignified tall firs begin.
> Bluish, associating with their shadows,
> a million Christmas trees stand
> waiting for Christmas. The water seems suspended
> above the rounded gray and blue-gray stones.
> I have seen it over and over, the same sea, the same,
> slightly, indifferently swinging above the stones

Tomlinson suggests that what is passed on from Moore to her younger friend Bishop is something more subtle than "influence"; what is betokened by the image of the fir is fidelity to visual appearances, economy of means, personal reticence—just those aesthetic and moral values that Tomlinson's readers know to be his as well.

In the 1983 review, however, he elaborates more freely on the "plenitude" of Ruskin's pine-tree passage. It suggested to Moore, he speculates, that

> if only Ruskin's wit could be rescued from his eloquence, the twentieth-century poet could write of nature free of the egotistical sublime. Ruskin witty? Take his pine trees—"each like the shadow of the one beside it—upright, fixed, spectral, as troops of ghosts standing on the walls of Hades, not knowing each other. . . . The rock itself looks bent and shattered beside them,—fragile, weak, inconsistent, compared to their dark energy of delicate life, and monotony of enchanted pride—unnumbered, unconquerable." The shadow at the beginning of

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this passage, that fantasy of the ghosts, the pre-Lawrentian "dark energy of delicate life" all pull against the miscalculated organ notes of "unnumbered, unconquerable."[29]

Moore "sheers away at all this" in "An Octopus," seizing only what to her seems essential—the shadows, the frail rocks, the dark energy of life. Tomlinson sees Bishop, too, as having her own revisionary purposes—making of the image something "darker, post-imagist," with a "suggestion of threat in it," giving "a hint of the darkness about to fall, a margin of the sad and the inexplicable that refuses to be exorcized by her brave wit."

Tomlinson's remarks are as unexpectedly revealing about his own sensibility as they are about Ruskin, Moore, and Bishop. The emphasis on wit is odd, especially as the original Ruskin comparison of the pine trees to troops of ghosts seems more gothic than witty. But by "wit" he means the placing of one sharp edge against another as in collage, with that effect of discontinuity, incalculableness, and often humor that he himself achieves in many poems, his Mexican and American pieces being preeminent examples. Equally interesting is his observation on the marginal shadow and darkness in Bishop's poem, for it arises from his own awareness of shadows, reflections, and doubleness, the obscurity at the margins of the visible, and "the darkness about to fall."

Marianne Moore features once more in the circuitry of fir-tree images. In April 1959, just two-and-a-half years after receiving *Like a Bulwark* and while in the United States on a writer's fellowship, Tomlinson was invited to meet Moore in her Brooklyn apartment. The conversation turned to Ruskin, and they talked about the Ruskinian elements in "An Octopus" and "The Steeple-Jack," about a portrait of Ruskin by Millais that Moore recalled having seen somewhere, and about a visit Moore had made as a girl to Ruskin's home in Coniston, where she remembered a peacock feather on display. The meeting recorded in *Some Americans* had been commemorated many years earlier in "Over Brooklyn Bridge" (*CP*, pp. 101–02):

Goodbye
Miss Moore
I hope
the peacock's feather you once saw
at the house of Ruskin
has kept its variegations.

They also discussed what Tomlinson in his *Some Americans* account calls his "Ruskin piece." In that very Ruskinian volume *Seeing Is Believing*, which owed its 1958 publication in the United States to

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Kenner and a copy of which either Kenner or Tomlinson would undoubtedly have sent to Moore, there are two poems actually about Ruskin: "Geneva Restored" (*CP*, p. 36) and "Frondes Agrestes: On re-reading Ruskin" (*CP*, p. 35). Almost certainly, the latter is meant. First published in late 1957,[30] about a year after Tomlinson received the inscribed copy of *Like a Bulwark*, it is a collage—Moore-fashion—of quotations from Ruskin's *Frondes agrestes*:

> A leaf, catching the sun, transmits it:
> "First a Torch, then an emerald."
>
> "Compact, like one of its own cones":
> The round tree with the pyramid shadow.
>
> First the felicities, then
> The feelings to appraise them:
>
> Light, being in its untempered state,
> A rarity, we are (says the sage) meant
> To enjoy "most probably" the effects of mist.
>
> Nature's difficulties, her thought
> Over dints and bosses, her attempts
> To beautify with a leopard-skin of moss
> The rocks she has already sculpted,
> All disclose her purposes—the thrush's bill,
> The shark's teeth, are not his story.
>
> Sublimity is. One awaits its passing,
> Organ voice dissolving among cloud wrack.
> The climber returns. He brings
> Sword-shaped, its narrowing strip
> Fluted and green, the single grass-blade, or
> Gathered up into its own translucence
> Where there is no shade save colour, the unsymbolic rose.

The various snippets of the collage serve different purposes. Some pay homage to Ruskin's observant eye; some mock, with a Moore-like tartness, his lapses into sublimity and his effusiveness about Nature's grand purposes. The concluding image of the unsymbolic and shadeless rose is a transcription of the image which Tomlinson happened upon the first time he opened *Frondes agrestes*, and which, in its accuracy and beauty, convinced him that he must read further in Ruskin.[31] The two lines on the fir tree are a tribute to Ruskin's observation of recurrences in natural forms (the shape of the tree echoed differently in its cone

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and in its shadow). And, given the available plenitude of images in Ruskin's lengthy description of the pine, it is significant that Tomlinson's eye should fall yet again on shadow.

The two lines on shadow are of course particles from the description of pine trees that Moore had rifled for "An Octopus." A tribute to and critique of Ruskin undoubtedly, the poem is by inference also a tribute to Moore's discriminating eye and mind, which she must have recognized when they talked about it in her Brooklyn apartment.

We have seen the fir trees reflected in and refracted through a number of texts by other writers, and have seen these texts themselves observed and reflected on by Tomlinson over five decades, from the late Forties to 1983. Like molecules entering new chemical combinations, they have combined with and drawn attention to several aspects of Tomlinson's imagination: the perception of design and recurrent form in nature, the shaping of visual perception by language, the submergence of the ego necessary to these perceptions, the concept of wit and disjunction, the sense of mystery in visual phenomena (optical at first, then edging toward metaphysical). A number of critics have noted Ruskin's presence in Tomlinson's discernment of detail and his fidelity to visual surfaces. But the fir-tree fragments have unexpectedly led us further, to an enterprise equally Ruskinian, though not part of the stock conception of Ruskin—that is, to Tomlinson's sense of the shadows and obscurity at the edge of the visual, and to an intimation of his profound *critique* of visual appearances.

[1] A lengthy bibliography of works by and about Tomlinson and a chronology of his life including prizes and honors are included in the collection of critical essays and interviews edited by Kathleen O'Gorman, *Charles Tomlinson: Man and Artist* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1988).

[2] "Charles Tomlinson" [1961 interview], in *The Poet Speaks*, ed. Peter Orr (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), p. 251.

[3] Charles Tomlinson/Alan Ross, "Words and Water" [interview], *London Magazine*, 20, No. 10 (1981), 22–39.

[4] *PN Review*, 59, No. 14 (1987), 57.

[5] *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, Library Edition, 39 vols. (London: George Allen, 1903–12), IV, 36; hereafter cited as *Works*. The phrase is quoted by Tomlinson in his "Magisterial Eye" [review of two books on Ruskin], *Sewanee Review*, 70 (1962), 220–28.

[6] Although botanists would like to limit the word "fir" to a particular genus, most nonbotanists, including Ruskin and the poets to be discussed in this essay, use the word to refer to any type of conifer, thus to both the spruce and the pine under discussion here.

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[7] Ruskin, *Works*, VIII, 124. In order to include details relevant to later discussion, the excerpt given in the text is longer than the one Tomlinson reports having read to Kenner.

[8] Charles Tomlinson, *Some Americans: A Personal Record* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981). Here and elsewhere, I draw on Tomlinson's accounts of meeting Kenner and Moore on pp. 14–16, 23, and 32–36.

[9] Hugh Kenner, *A Homemade World* (New York: Knopf, 1975), p. 97.

[10] Graham Hough, *The Last Romantics* (London: Duckworth, 1949), pp. 10–11.

[11] Charles Tomlinson, *Collected Poems* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), p. 101; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *CP*.

[12] Hough, *The Last Romantics*, p. 12.

[13] Tomlinson quotes from *The Elements of Drawing* in "Magisterial Eye," pp. 224–25.

[14] John Ruskin, quoted in "Introduction," *The Elements of Drawing and the Elements of Perspective* (London: Dent, 1907), p. ix. The passage comes from *Works*, VI, 79. The entire chapter of *Modern Painters* from which the passage is taken, "Of Turnerian Mystery,—First, As Essential," is relevant to the paradox of distinctness and obscurity.

[15] "Introduction," *The Elements of Drawing*, p. ix.

[16] For only two of many examples, see *Works*, III, 165–68, and XV, 90.

[17] Charles Tomlinson, *Notes from New York* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1984), p. 63.

[18] Ruskin, *Works*, XV, 27–28*n*.

[19] Date and title given in personal communication to the author. *Frondes agrestes: Readings in "Modern Painters,"* selected by Susan Beever, ed. John Ruskin (London: George Allen, 1875); many subsequent editions.

[20] Ruskin, *Frondes agrestes*, footnote to section 18.

[21] Ruskin, *Works*, VII, 105–06; *Frondes agrestes*, section 47. The punctuation of the passage in *Works* differs from that in *Frondes agrestes*; I have followed the latter.

[22] Tomlinson, "Magisterial Eye," p. 224.

[23] Tomlinson, *Some Americans*, p. 6.

[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 3, 9.

[25] Marianne Moore, *The Complete Poems* (New York: Macmillan and Viking, 1967), p. 71.

[26] "Introduction: Marianne Moore, Her Poetry and Her Critics," in *Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Charles Tomlinson (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), pp. 2–3.

[27] Charles Tomlinson, "Looking out for Wholeness," *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 June 1983, p. 575.

[28] Elizabeth Bishop, *The Complete Poems: 1927–1979* (New York: Farrar, 1983), pp. 64–66.

[29] Tomlinson, "Looking out for Wholeness," p. 575.

[30] *Essays in Criticism*, 7 (1957), 418.

[31] Personal communication to the author.

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A Methodology of Reading *Finnegans Wake*

Susan Shaw Sailer

Deconstructive critics have helped readers understand that any text slips the bounds of containability laid upon it. Some texts, however, are more slippery than others. Certain of Donald Barthelme's fiction, many of John Ashbery's poems, Jacques Derrida's *Glas*, and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, for instance, offer greater resistance to readers' efforts to comprehend them than do most other texts. Although these works belong to the twentieth century, "unreadable" texts are not limited to our era; witness, for example, Blake's *The Four Zoas*. Such texts may be problematic because their words' first allegiance is to an interiority that refuses the distinction between images of the time/space world and those of the unconscious or subconscious mind. But other conditions also problematize texts. While concerned with referentiality, writers may have constructed their texts so as to deny linear readings of them. The readers' task is then to discover how to make connections within the text in order to locate or construct its coherence. The process by which we construct a text's coherence is the act of reading. The failure we experience in trying to make connections in traditional ways forces us to learn to read these problematic texts on their own terms.

Finnegans Wake, for instance, demands that readers become acrobats of the text, reading horizontally, vertically, circularly—as simultaneously as possible. Any given passage functions through at least six different kinds of verbal operations, which I will henceforth term logics in order to emphasize that these operations mark principles by which readers make connections among textual elements and thus discover the *Wake*'s coherence. The discussion that follows draws upon many readers' observations, using them to synthesize the reading

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process we must learn if we hope to become readers of Joyce's most difficult text.

Let us begin with the verbal operation I term the logic of synecdoche; not that in which a part stands for the whole, but rather a synecdoche in which the part is identical to the whole.[1] The logic of one part or one individual identical to a larger entity or a class operates broadly throughout the *Wake*, HCE, for example, as Everyman and ALP as Everywoman. Also, a "year" such as 432 or 566 or 1132 is identical to the whole of time viewed as the chronology in which events occur. Further, the fall of Finnegan is identical to HCE's crime in the Park, both being identical to the fall of humans from perfection and the resultant humanizing of an imperfect world.

The second operation I call the logic of the fictive. If by fiction we understand a set of invented circumstances in which belief or disbelief is irrelevant, then we might define the logic of the fictive as that which obtains when words operate on other words not out of belief but out of the attitude, "what if. . . ." Such a logic operates from a base in play rather than in truth or belief. It accepts the status of fictions as ideational constructs for attaining certain ends; it violates the reader's concept of the traditionally factual or logical—while forcing the reader to recognize this violation. We can see fictive logic especially clearly in those chapters and fables governed either by a relatively specifiable overall design or by a relatively high rate of narrative connexity. The Children's Games chapter, for instance, with its pantomime format and the three attempts Glugg makes to guess the color of Izod's drawers at once violates the reader's concept of children's language at play even as it confirms the reader's sense of the material underlying much of children's play. The chapter's ideational construct shows forth the immature, unconsummated nature of sexuality in childhood. Similarly, while suggesting its relatedness to Aesop's Fable of the Ant and Grasshopper, Joyce's Fable of the Ondt and the Gracehoper violates the logic of the earlier version's moral precept by undermining the ondt's behavioral superiority and maintaining a balance between the ondt's spatial and the gracehoper's time orientation. Again, the fable's ideational construct supports its structure, serving to establish reciprocity between rival male siblings.

The third operation I call the logic of equivalence and interchangeability, which forms the basis for much of Joyce's treatment of times, places, and characters in the *Wake*. HCE in his protean forms and ALP in hers offer clear instances of this logic. ALP is Anna Livia Plurabelle, the river Liffey, the Prankquean, the Hen, Granny, Eve; HCE is

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Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, Tim Finnegan, Persse O'Reilly, Adam, Noah, St. Patrick, Daedalus, King Leary. The equivalence and interchangeability of Dublin, Georgia, with Dublin, Ireland, parallels that of North Armorica with North America. The necessary conjunction of sun and rain to produce a rainbow accounts for the triad of sun god Shaun, rain in the potential form of Issy as Nuvoletta or Little Cloud and in the actual form of Issy's tears, and the Rainbow Girls as a result of the interaction of Issy and Shaun.

We might call the fourth operation cluster logic since each unit of the text or even a section of certain units tends to proceed with a cluster of related words that reflects its mood, provides a counterpoint to overt themes, or in other ways suggests how the passage may be read. Each passage, in other words, proceeds with a logic appropriate to its "subject," which then may generate a series of words that forms tangents with this "subject." The Ondt and Gracehoper fable, for instance, is packed with several hundred words relating to insects—their scientific and common names, the stages of their development, their behavior, their mythical and historical associations. Since both the ondt and gracehoper belong to the phylum of insects in at least one sense of their identities, the connection between characters of the fragment and the word clusters relating to insects is clear. Some units or their subsections show the influence of two or more groups of word clusters. Many of the words in Johnny MacDougall's commentary in Book II, Chapter 4, for instance, may be clustered under two categories, horses and Irish myth/history. Here, the horses associate Johnny with his province of Connaught, an area which by tradition has prided itself on its love of horses; the myth/history cluster links Johnny to his role as one of the four Irish historians.

The fifth logic we might call the logic of dynamics. Two opposing directions are nearly always at work simultaneously in any passage in *Finnegans Wake*, a narrative forward movement and a motivic recursive movement. Usually one or the other prevails. One might expect that in the fables and tales, the narrative forward movement would dominate and that in other passages the motivic recursive movement would do so, but this is not a general pattern. While narrativity dominates movement in the Prankquean/Jarl van Hoother tale, for example, this is not the case with either the tale of How Buckley Shot the Russian General or the tale of Kersse the Tailor and the Norwegian Ship's Captain. Although the geometry-lesson chapter contains much narrative material, long subsections of it are so heavily motivic that their narrative content is virtually indeterminate.

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To see how the direction of movement within a passage affects readers' perceptions of its logic, let us compare the two Mutt and Jute dialogues, 15.29 through 18.16 and 609.24 through 610.32. The former passage offers scant narrativity but especially rich motivic content. Motifs—which I define following Clive Hart's explanation of them as "short verbal construct[s], characterized by certain easily recognizable patterns of rhythm, sound, form and sometimes, sense"[2]—may be grouped into four categories: those dealing with Irish history, those associated with the characters of *Finnegans Wake*, those related to Irish culture, and those focusing on peculiarly Wakean notions and images, as, for example, the Fall. In the latter Mutt and Jute passage, however, motivic development is insignificant; what impels the reader through the lines is not recognition of familiar motifs but the recognition of narrative sequence, which may not manifest itself upon a first or even a second reading. That narrative presents Muta's and Juva's prefiguration of the contest that Patrick and the Archdruid are about to undergo. Any of the text's units, then, requires to be read in the directions in which it moves. If that movement is primarily forward, the reader has not read the passage until those forward-moving connections can be made. Conversely, if the movement is primarily recursive, readers have not read the passage until they recognize similar motifs from passages read previously. The majority of passages shows both kinds of movement, so that in reading them readers need to be able to follow both directions simultaneously.

The sixth operation we shall call associative logic. What the reader must do here is recognize the nature of the associations that connect sentence with sentence or one group of sentences with another when those connections cannot be explained by narrative or motivic development or by cluster logic. As an example of how associative logic works, let us consider the long transition between the end of the Prankquean/Jarl van Hoother tale and the beginning of the fragment in which Finnegan "wakens" at his own wake. The transition appears to be a series of modulations in identity, from the private individual van Hoother to the community burger to the warrior Norronsen to the great leader Unfru-Chikda-Uru-Wukra to the fallen Finnegan and his potential for rebirth as the risen Finn. Looked at in this way, the modulations mark a progress from less inclusive to more inclusive identity, or from a nearly totally private to a nearly totally public identity. Besides this transition passage, other units whose movement may be clarified by analysis of associative linkages include the long parenthetical "half time" in Book II, Chapter 2, during which Shem

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and Shaun change sides, and the introduction to Book II, Chapter 3, which precedes the tale of Kersse the Tailor and the Norwegian Ship's Captain.

This examination of the multiple logics operating in *Finnegans Wake* shows the necessity of reading the text in multiple directions, not one at a time, but as simultaneously as the reader can perform. Some of the logics require a horizontal reading; others, a vertical reading; and still others, a recursive reading. The logics of the fictive, of associative connexity, and of narrative dynamics, for example, ask the reader to link one sentence or paragraph to the unit that follows. On the other hand, the logics of synecdoche, equivalence and interchangeability, and motivic dynamics require a recursive linkage between separated units. Cluster logic demands yet a third direction, the vertical, as readers collect word clusters within a unit. These multiple directions of reading require that the reader approach the *Wake* in a manner similar to that by which an orchestral score is read: horizontally for diachronous elements, vertically for synchronous elements, and recursively for the repetition or variation of elements previously introduced.

To see how these six logics enable a reading of the *Wake*, let us use them to examine a particular passage, the Archdruid and St. Patrick interchange, pages 611–13. Associative logic is not helpful in understanding this passage, perhaps because the Patrick/Archdruid interchange is dominated by narrative concerns and verbal play but relatively uninfluenced by the capacity of one word, phrase, or sentence to generate another solely through associational links. Synecdochic logic offers some insight. Through the synecdoche of HCE's initials identifying his presence, we realize that we are to associate King Leary with HCE when Leary is referred to on page 612 as *H*ighup Big Cockywocky Sublissimime. In case we have missed that reference, the words in the following sentence provide another synecdoche of the same kind: "Hump cumps Ebblybally." Another synecdoche that operates both within the fragment as well as between this and other fragments is the use of color. The Archdruid's seven-hued mantle and Patrick's white tunic are both synecdoches of the perspectives through which each views the world. Also, synecdoche links the Rainbow Girls to the Archdruid. Finally, the phrase "zoantholitic furniture" echoes "furniture of earth," Bishop Berkeley's synecdoche for the totality of material objects in the world.[3]

The logic of equivalence and interchangeability provides a wealth of significant links between this and other fragments. We recognize the acts of Kev's hitting Dolph and Buckley's shooting the Russian General

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as equivalent to the Archdruid's "shuck[ing] his thumping fore features apt the hoyhop of His Ards" (612.34–35). Another equivalent or interchangeable act is the Russian General's violating Irish turf by using it to wipe his arse and Patrick's sacralizing that same turf by making a handful of shamrocks the symbol of the Trinity. It is not the first time in this text that Joyce has made violation and sacralizing two sides of the same coin. This logic also points out the equivalence of the rival brothers seen elsewhere, for instance as the Dolph/Kev pair, and here as Archdruid/Patrick. Finally, King Leary in this fragment becomes an HCE figure, as noted above, bearing the power of the father but lacking both the energy and the vision of the sons who vie for his kingdom.

Fictive logic provides the structure in which the fragment's narrative rests. The fragment's basis in play may be seen in the manner in which Leary's bet is couched, so that no matter whether saint or sage is victor, Leary's money rests with the winner. It is seen, too, in the Archdruid's aggressive anger toward Leary, thrusting his fingers up the latter's arse, which when read in context manifests neither anger nor aggression but instead suggests a sexual act that calls to mind the buggery that HCE may or may not be guilty of through his so-called crime in the park. The fictive end attained in the fragment is the establishment of the dynamics of social change, where change in the social order is viewed as natural, inevitable, and rhythmic or cyclic. The side that can create an image symbolizing unlimited power in such a way as to be comprehensible to the masses will predominate until such a time as the side that can generate a sense of the power of invisible mystery resumes control of those same masses. In the end, Joyce implies the equivalency of both sides. The apparent violation of traditional logic that marks the logic of the fictive may be observed in the passage's dense wordplay as well as in its languages of pidgin Chinese for the traditionally Irish Archdruid and pidgin Japanese for the equally Irish Patrick.

The logic of word clusters shows us four groupings that can account for the presence of nearly any word of the passage: those words relating to pidgin Chinese or Japanese, those relating to the nature of color, those depicting the tension between verbalization and action, and those verbal plays on references to aspects of Irish culture, including religious phrases and lines from songs and poems. These four groups constitute the word clusters under which the fragment's various words and phrases may be organized.

Regarding the logic of dynamics, the Patrick/Archdruid interchange is powered equally by forward narrative movement and the

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recursive movement of motifs and wordplay. Its narrative may be presented as follows: Wearing his seven-hued mantle, the Archdruid completed his ruminations and then spoke to his guest, the Catholic Patrick who, wearing his priest's white tunic, was chanting along with the gray friars accompanying him. The Archdruid told them that no man is free because the visible world is an illusion. However, a seer recognizes that reality is within rather than without. Patrick did not understand what the Archdruid had said, so the Archdruid attempted another explanation, this time using examples of color to show the difference between inner reality and outer illusion. Patrick remained unconvinced. Now it was his turn. Rather than speak, Patrick acted: he brought a handful of shamrocks to his face and then genuflected three times to the sky. As he knelt, praying, the sun began to rise. The Irish masses who had been watching were profoundly impressed and acknowledged the supremacy of Patrick's power over the Archdruid's, who, in anger, shoved his four fingers up the High King's arse.

Now, while this narrative provides the reader with insights about what has "happened," it accounts for no more than approximately half the passage's words. Many of the other half are forms of wordplay and thus additional instances of the passage's cluster logic. One of the wordplays involves the triple naming of an item, sometimes moving from the descriptive to the comparative to the superlative degrees as the item repeats. Examples include the references to the Archdruid as first "Balkelly," then as "Bilkilly-Belkelly," and finally as "Bilkilly-Belkelly-Balkally," and the rainbow as first "Balenoarch"—"Balenoarch" being an anagram on *arcobaleno*, the Italian for "rainbow"—next as "Great Balenoarch," and third as "Greatest Great Balenoarch." Other triple references include the earlier mentioned "heptachromatic," "sevenhued," and "septicoloured" mantle of the Archdruid, the structure of "trampatrampatramp," and "the firethere the sun in his halo cast" (the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost).

Besides the wordplay of triple namings, Joyce develops the motif of the "pidgining" of English, seen in such "pidginisms" as "tsinglontseng," "untisintus," and "patfella." A third form of wordplay is the "formal" openings and closings of the passage's paragraphs. The first opens with "Tunc," which parallels the second paragraph's opening with "Punc." The first closes with the formulaic "Hump cumps Ebblybally!" and "Sukkot" gives a phonetic equivalent of the other name by which Patrick was known, Sochet. The question mark following "Sukkot" invites Patrick to speak. The second paragraph closes with the equally formulaic "Onmen," a variation of the hundreds of "Amens" that close

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paragraphs periodically throughout the text. The top paragraph on page 613 ends with the phonetic equivalent of the Latin closing of a prayer, "per jucundum Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum Filium Tuum," and the paragraph that concludes the fragment ends with another Latin phrase Joyce uses frequently throughout the text to close a section, "Fuit Fiat," "as it was, let it be."

Still another kind of wordplay occurs in phonetic equivalences or anagrammatic variations between adjacent or neighboring words. Examples include "seecut" and "Sukkot," "Good safe firelamp" and "Goldselforelump," "aposterioprismically apatstrophied" and "paralogically periparolysed," and "bygotter," "bogcotton," and "begad." These four kinds of wordplay indicate just the tip of the iceberg of verbal complexities. As examples, though, they indicate the extent to which Joyce slows down apprehension of the forward-moving narrative by forcing readers into recursive directions as they discover the presence of more and more word clusters.

This examination of the Patrick/Archdruid unit via the six logics demonstrates the extraordinary demands *Finnegans Wake* makes upon the reader. Not only must we follow a narrative line only too capable of thinning out to the extent that it becomes unfollowable, we must recognize motifs that recur in varied ways and realize that motivic and narrative development operate at the expense of each other. Not only does any entity function as part identical to a greater whole, of which that whole in turn forms part, but that entity is equivalent to and interchangeable with a range of other entities to which it bears at once the closest and yet the most distant relationship. Not only does any word tend to form a cluster with other words, but any word becomes capable itself of motivic development and variation. Not only may any sentence attach itself to its neighbors through narrative or motivic connections but also through associations so subtle as to escape notice, yet once noticed, so "natural" as to compel acceptance. And through all these operations runs the spirit of play, the violation of tradition, the fiction of "what if."

But while these logics synthesize the verbal operations readers perform in locating and constructing the coherence of *Finnegans Wake*, they do not compose the process by which we read Ashbery's poems, Barthelme's fictions, Derrida's *Glas*, or Blake's *Zoas*. Each problematic text requires that we approach it on its own terms.

[1] Hazard Adams, "Synecdoche and Method," *Critical Paths: Blake and the*

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Argument of Method, eds. D. Ault, D. Miller, and M. Bracher (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1987).

[2] Clive Hart, *Structure and Motif in* Finnegans Wake (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1962), p. 41.

[3] Roland McHugh, *Annotations to* Finnegans Wake (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1980), p. 611.

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Poetymologies in Seamus Heaney's *Wintering Out*

Henry Hart

When Seamus Heaney remarked to Elgy Gillespie of the *Irish Times*, "I've been writing poems lately that grow out of words and ways of talking,"[1] he revealed that his attentiveness to language had taken a new philological turn. His first two books, *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark*, as critics were quick to notice, resonated with heavily stressed vowels and consonants, and depicted Irish landscapes in images as sensuous as they were harsh. In *Wintering Out* (London: Faber, 1972) the poems began to sketch Irish "wordscapes" in which even the vowels and consonants conveyed mythic significance. In the Age of the Sign and the Text, a shift from the objects and events words denote to the binary oppositions and ideological tensions implicit in them seems common enough. But what is startling about Heaney's "wordscapes" is the deft, unobtrusive way they delineate allegories of his Northern Irish heritage. From the phonetic and lexical features of individual words he creates moving dramas in which religious, political, literary, and sexual differences clash and fuse.

Heaney's leap from an early, gritty pastoralism, which countered stock images of Arcadian groves and teary-eyed shepherds playing on oaten flutes with tales of actual farming, to a linguistic poetry whose characters and plots derived from little-known words, left many of his critics baffled. An anonymous reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* echoed the sentiments of many by complaining that the new poems failed to confront the resurgence of violence in Northern Ireland. "No one was plucking up" cobbles "to throw them at anyone," the reviewer stated, as if Heaney, in order to be taken seriously, had to don the role of Sam Peckinpah or Stanley Kubrick. The article concluded: "*Wintering*

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Out gives the slightly unsatisfactory impression of being a transitional book, skirting round themes he is reluctant to tackle head on."[2] Stephen Spender in the *New York Review of Books*, following suit, suggested that it was Heaney's intoxication with words that blinded him "to a much wider subject matter." Compared to Joyce, "he is still at the *Dubliners* stage of his development,"[3] that is, at square one. In the *London Magazine* Gavin Ewart rated the book "a bit dull" and called for a more forthright documentation of "the troubles of Ulster; not because of up-to-dateness, but because the time has come for him to leave his roots alone."[4] Heaney's roots in the Catholic, Nationalist community of the North, for Ewart, did not matter, even when he was trying to explore his personal complicity in the Troubles. Michael Wood in *Parnassus* found *Wintering Out* "far less poised and precise . . . and a good deal shallower"[5] than the two previous books. Although Alan Brownjohn in the *New Statesman* was more complimentary, he also found "Heaney's retrenchment in *Wintering Out* . . . baffling."[6] A perceptive essay in the *Critical Quarterly* by John Wilson Foster took pains to illuminate the allegorical complexities of Heaney's new "language-poems," but concluded: "Unfortunately these resourceful poems are so cerebral that when they fail as arguments (not necessarily by being false but by being unclear), they fail ultimately as poems."[7]

Seamus Deane, in many ways Heaney's most insightful critic, was one of the only reviewers of *Wintering Out* to explain Heaney's problem, and to point out that Heaney was painfully aware of it. To turn poetry into a bullhorn for broadcasting political policies would ruin its lyric impulse, he suggested, but poetic rhetoric that excludes political exigencies smacks of irresponsibility, of a willful indifference toward the community's real suffering. Regarding Heaney's sins of omission and commission, Deane commented:

> The poems express no politics and indeed they flee conceptual formulations with an almost indecent success. Instead they interrogate the quality of the relationship between the poet and his mixed political and literary traditions. The answer is always the same. Relationship is unavoidable, but commitment, relationship gone vulgar, is a limiting risk. Nevertheless commitment is demanded during a crisis. . . .[8]

To articulate a moral response to the causes and manifestations of sectarian conflict in Ireland was not enough. Deane concluded: "He is called upon to assume responsibility. In doing so, he does not satisfy his critics, for whom his commitment is not of the sort they want; nor does

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he satisfy himself, for, in attempting to do 'the whole job of culture,' he may forget to live."[9]

"Living" as a Catholic in Belfast sometimes means fighting and dying for minority rights. Although Heaney actively participated in the Civil Rights marches in 1968, and a few weeks later declared angrily in the *Listener*: "the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland at large, if it is to retain any self-respect, will have to risk the charge of wrecking the new moderation and seek justice more vociferously,"[10] two years later he decided to leave Belfast. In 1970 he took a temporary position at Berkeley, and after returning in 1971, in the midst of the Provisional IRA's new bombing campaign, he left permanently for Wicklow in the South. The critical consensus was that Heaney's *Wintering Out*, published the year of his departure, was a cop-out as well. His preoccupation with language and poetic craft was simply the literary analogue of his political betrayal.

Heaney was certainly aware of his divided allegiances. In his discussion with Robert Druce, he confessed:

> I'm always thinking to myself—when people are killing one another, what are *you* doing? . . . And I came to this notion that, in a time of politics or violence, it wasn't the artist's function just to be liberal and deplore it, but if you believed in one set of values over the other, to maintain those values in some way. You needn't necessarily maintain that belief by writing political poetry or writing deploring the army. . . . But I think you can write about, or out of a sensibility or a set of images which imply a set of values.[11]

What critics of *Wintering Out* objected to was the way Heaney implied rather than declaimed his politics. Heaney approached Ulster's turmoil from his own oblique angle, a technique every writer employs when facing a well-worn subject. Literary strategies, for better or worse, often preclude political ones. As Blake Morrison pointed out: "What *Wintering Out* does is to explore the deeper structures of present hostilities, the way in which divisions of Protestant and Catholic communities are embedded in language and topography."[12] Heaney's tacit values are those of a physician who seeks a cure for a chronic disease. Although Gavin Ewart accused Heaney of advocating "the ordinary, unscientific view" ("He isn't in there, whirling, with the atoms"),[13] Heaney's eye is trained with scientific deliberation on the X ray of his broken inheritance—the spoken and written language of Ulster.

In Heaney's vision, however, science and myth conjoin. Unlike

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Spenser, whose imperialistic schemes were built into *The Faerie Queene* and whose vicious plans to garrison and starve Ireland into submission were articulated in *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (a book alluded to in both *Wintering Out* and *North*), Heaney devises subtle, miniature allegories in which the binary oppositions within words assume bodily forms and act out political, religious, poetic, and sexual battles that have sundered Ireland for centuries. Vowels are Irish, Nationalist, Catholic, and female; they stand for a Gaelic literary tradition and for the mythic body and soil of Mother Ireland herself. Consonants are English, Anglo- or Scots-Irish, Unionist, Protestant, and masculine; they embody an Anglo-Saxon literary tradition and a rapacious, patriarchal England bent on imperial dominance.

When Heaney alludes to Spenser at the end of "Bog Oak" he is rebutting the allegorical techniques of the earlier poet as well as his invidious politics, but he is also revealing his own guilty sense of collusion in "dreamy" attempts to impose myths, allegorical or otherwise, onto a culture's living body. His tone suggests a sad recognition of complicity rather than an angry denunciation:

> Perhaps I just make out
> Edmund Spenser
> dreaming of sunlight
> encroached upon by
>
> geniuses who creep
> "out of every corner
> of the woodes and glennes"
> towards watercress and carrion.

The vision of the dreaming poet haunted by the ghosts of his political sins recurs in Heaney's poetry. Usually, however, it is Heaney whose sunlit reveries turn into accusing nightmares.

Although much of *The Faerie Queene* was set in Ireland, Heaney finds little use for knights "pricking on the plain / Y-clad in mighty arms" (*FQ*, I, i, st. 1). He too aims for an allegorical marriage, but between Protestants and Catholics in Ireland rather than, as with Spenser, between English institutions and their imperial destiny. While *The Faerie Queene* musters all sorts of arcane ceremonies (the lighting of sacred lamps "For feare of evill fates," sprinkling of "all the posts with wine," and perfuming the house "with frankensense divine" [*FQ*, I, xii, sts. 37–38]) in order to consecrate its sacred sense of marriage between Una and the Redcrosse Knight, for Heaney the vocables of everyday Anglo-Irish speech suffice as tokens of an equally compelling marriage.

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Rather than *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland* acts as the more potent catalyst for Heaney's allegorical poems. Irenius and Eudoxus (Ireland and "good judgment"), the two figures who carry on a dialogue in *A View*, represent different sides of Spenser's personality, just as the Gaelic and Anglo-Saxon phonemes represent two sides of Heaney's. Heaney would agree with Eudoxus' belief that one should approach Irish problems like "wise physicians which first require that the malady be known thoroughly and discovered, [and] afterwards do teach how to cure and redress it."[14] But while Heaney's alter egos agonizingly attempt to redress old wounds, Spenser's twins chat urbanely about the most efficient way to bring Ireland to its knees. Curing, for them, means killing, and their targets are Irish words, Irish customs, and the Irish rebels who seek to perpetuate them. Linguistic imperialism is no figment of paranoia, but a principle of Elizabethan colonialism explicitly outlined by Eudoxus. He speaks for both Spenser and his Anglican cohorts: "It seemeth strange to me that the English should take more delight to speak that language [Irish] than their own, whereas they should (methinks) rather take scorn to acquaint their tongues thereto, for it hath been ever the use of the conqueror to despise the language of the conquered, and to force him by all means to learn his."[15]

To eradicate the corrupting Irish influence among the English immigrants, Irenius finally dreams up his "modest proposal," which Heaney refers to at the end of "Bog Oak." By starving the natives into cannibalism, so that "they would quickly consume themselves and devour one another,"[16] the English can subjugate the nation as well as avoid the high cost of a protracted military campaign. Irenius offers historical precedents (the "late wars in Munster") as evidence that his gruesome tactics can work. Heaney quotes from his argument:

> Out of every corner of the woods and glens they came creeping forth upon their hands, for their legs could not bear them. They looked like anatomies of death, they spake like ghosts crying out of their graves, they did eat of the dead carrions, happy were they could find them, yea and one another soon after in so much as the very carcasses they spared not to scrape out of their graves, and if they found a plot of water cress or shamrocks, there they flocked as to a feast for the time, yet not able long to continue therewithal, that in short space there were none almost left and a most populous and plentiful country suddenly left void of man or beast.[17]

If Heaney makes Spenser into a monument to poetic guilt, he also

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makes sure to distinguish his sins from his precursor's. By choosing art over political engagement Heaney may be allowing the old Plantation mentality, which Spenser directly fostered as secretary to Lord Grey, a right-of-way. But his art advocates unity and reconciliation on Irish soil at every turn, and speaks eloquently against bloodshed to all who will listen.

Heaney's allegorical "wordscapes" have a political message even though it may not be the sort that makes politicians stand up and vote. As Neil Corcoran observes, a poem like "Broagh" delivers "an implicit emblem for some new political community . . . it acts as a linguistic paradigm of a reconciliation beyond sectarian division."[18] Most of the poems that explore the etymological roots of words tell one story and one history too. The central narrative has the charm of a fairy tale but the candor of a documentary. It proposes an original unity where one language (Gaelic) was spoken. The language, Heaney presumes, was feminine, a natural, spontaneous efflorescence of the Irish earth. During the Renaissance the phallocentric, imperialistic language of England, clanging with Anglo-Saxon armor, invaded, raped, and conquered. Consonants were grafted onto vowels. Having fallen from power, feminine Ireland rose up only to be beaten down. The history of rebellion, dating back to Norman invasions in the Middle Ages, is embedded in the language like a fossil record. Heaney rereads and rewrites the fossil record of ancient antagonism, fashioning new emblems of adversity as well as new emblems of cooperation. The word redeems in Heaney's catholic poetics, not by ignoring or changing the past but by witnessing its injustices and offering judicious alternatives.

Heaney has often been accused of distorting history with myth (especially by Edna Longley and Ciaran Carson), and in his philological poems he surely gives a highly stylized and condensed version of Anglo-Irish history. From a poet who once said about his childhood in Northern Ireland, "I think Catholicism meant *everything* to me . . . because it was my whole life,"[19] one might expect a vision of history refracted through the lens of Christian typology. Even though Heaney's version of linguistic history presupposes an Eden, a vulnerable, innocent Eve, a Satanic intruder, a fall into conflict, and a redemption through the "word," it also self-reflexively attacks myth and reorders its classic priorities. As in the pagan, matriarchal myths Robert Graves examines in *The White Goddess*, a book that reinforced Heaney's "Mariolatry," the allegorical woman comes first in Heaney's narrative rather than second, as Eve does in the Bible. If she is militarily and economically weaker than England, she is so because of the exigencies

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of history rather than the prejudices of Heaney. She does not fall of her own free will, as Milton would have it; rather she falls because of multiple acts of patriarchal aggression. Redemption, as Adrienne Rich might assert, is "the dream of a common language," not the Christ-Word dead on the cross but secular words living on communal tongues, uniting "crossed" factions traditionally opposed in inarticulate combat.

To claim that Heaney employs "gender stereotypes" and myths in an unreflective, patriarchal way grossly simplifies his mythic method. Like Wallace Stevens or James Joyce, Heaney is the most self-conscious of mythmakers. His poems dissect "supreme fictions" in order to forge them anew. Believing in myths that express personal and cultural fixations presents no philosophical difficulties for Heaney, since he consistently addresses them as fictions. In his interview with John Haffenden he remarked: "I'm not what you call a pious Catholic . . . [but] I've never felt any need to rebel or do a casting-off of God or anything like that, because I think in this day anthropologists and mythologists have taught us a lot, to live with our myths."[20] To another interviewer he added: "I think we have become more aware . . . of the deep value of some kind of belief, of some kind of ritual. Of their value as fictions, if you like, or as structures. And I suppose I am grateful for the whole burden of Catholicism in that way."[21] While Catholicism is his seminal myth, the lineaments of his ultimate myth approximate what Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* called the "monomyth," a story in which all myths fit into one organic, catholic whole.

Joyce's intense sensitivity to the political and religious connotations of words, and his way of mythologizing them, provided Heaney with valuable directives. If Joyce scored the soft, lambent vowel-flow of Irish into the monologues of his archetypal women, Molly Bloom and Anna Livia Plurabelle, and the harsher, consonantal hammer strokes of English into his archetypal men, Leopold Bloom and Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, Heaney composes similarly, but on a less grandiose scale. In an essay Heaney remarked how Joyce "could invest the very names of punctuation marks with historical riddles when he addressed his people as 'Laities and gentes, full-stoppers and semi-colonials'" and that his mythic method "melted time and place into a plasm of rhythms and word-roots, puns and tunes, a slide-show of Freudian slips for the Jungian type-setter."[22] With Joyce in his wake, Heaney's allegories of vowels and consonants seem traditionally Irish rather than eccentrically English. Both authors treat Ireland's Anglo-Gaelic language as a labyrinth of history's tortuous workings. They fly

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over it not to escape it but to gain a more panoramic perspective of the vestiges of a colonial past scarred on its walls.

As Heaney knows, if for no other reason than because he has read Joyce, philology and myth have joined hands throughout Western tradition. Up until 200 years ago, scholars of language tended to conjure up etymological scenarios as magicians might pull rabbits out of hats. Socrates in Plato's *Cratylus*, for example, traced "Poseidon" to *posi* (feet) and *desmos* (fetter) and argued, perhaps with tongue in cheek, that the root words expressed the god's difficulty walking through water. Medieval etymologists, working from a less enlightened Christian view than Heaney's, speculated that a universal language existed in Eden. The collapse of the tower of Babel reduced this primordial harmony to a discordant babble. Saint Isidore of Seville, whose twenty-volume *Etymologies* is the most authoritative source of the discipline during the Middle Ages, spoke for a consensus when he declared in the early 600s: "The different languages are a result of the Tower of Babel, and before that, there was a single language, Hebrew."[23] When Adam named the animals in Eden, according to medieval sages he did so in the divinely inspired language of the Old Testament fathers.

When philology became more scientific in the eighteenth century, etymologists still searched for mythic universals beneath language's puzzling surface. The famous linguist, Horne Tooke, exercised his scholarly imagination with great ingenuity in order to prove all parts of speech were originally signs for concrete things. Beneath the obfuscations of abstract words lay a prelapsarian Eden of earthly clarities. Etymology was his archaeological tool with which he could dig to the bottom of even the most tangled metaphysical problem. All he had to do was reveal the physical objects the abstract terms referred to. He ended up, however, promoting his own brand of what he derisively called "etymological metaphysics." Giambattista Vico, also writing during the eighteenth century (he would later provide Joyce with a cyclical model of culture for *Finnegans Wake*) formulated a similar metaphysics:

> The philosophers and philologians ought all, we claim, to have begun their treatment of the origin of language and letters from the following principles: that the first men conceived the ideas of things through imaginative characters [gods]; that, being mute, these men expressed themselves by actions and objects which have natural relations to these ideas.[24]

This natural "theological" language in which no ideas were expressed but in things, he concludes, was the universal language of Atlantis. The

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first language users, like Joyce's stuttering Earwicker, were tongue-tied giants as well as imagist poets whose speech came gradually from imitating Jove's thunder, and whose words for objects were the names of gods.

Around the turn of the eighteenth century, William Jones and Friedrich Schlegel renounced the etymological myths of their predecessors and applied painstaking scholarship to the linguistic problems of the past. Through his study of Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit, Jones hypothesized "that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists."[25] The mythical Atlantis—the original tongue behind all Indo-European languages—finally had been discovered "scientifically." But despite repeated attempts to locate it geographically and historically, it remained elusive, like a subatomic particle that can be verified but never precisely mapped. While Heaney's poetic etymologies are tied closely to actual geographical places and historical events, they fit into this wider context of philological myth and conjecture. He can be as fanciful as Vico, whose sentiments about poetic language he echoes vis-à-vis Joyce, or as meticulously scholarly as William Jones. In each case, however, he presupposes a lost Edenic source, an original unity, from which language has fallen. To reveal the historical disasters coming after the fall he examines their repercussions coded in the words themselves.

In his discussion of toponymy (the study of place names), the linguist Mario Pei shows how "in Europe and Asia . . . almost every place name contains a record of migrations and conquests, far-flung trading posts and garrison towns. . . . Changes in place names frequently reflect historical transfers of power and political events as well as nationalistic aspirations and ambitions."[26] Heaney, as the meditations on the place names of his homeground attest, would agree. In words like Toome, Broagh, Anahorish, and Mossbawn he traces Ulster's heritage of invasions precipitated by the military and commercial interests of Scottish and English planters, and countered by Irish patriots. As with Vico and Toome, Heaney's etymologizing aims to recover a sense of the actual places and objects the names have veiled. He redeems the clichés, and in tones of nostalgia and despair documents the sacred places that have been desecrated.

In the end, however, his etymological quests often find fulfillment in a transcendence of words, in a silent communion with the fecund, healing earth. Like Stevens, he too wants to "see the very thing and

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nothing else / Without evasion by a single metaphor." In later poems, as "etymologist of roots and graftings," Heaney admonishes:

> Come back past
> philology and kennings
> re-enter memory
> where the bone's lair
>
> is a love-nest
> in the grass.

"Mystery," as Heaney would know, derives from the Greek "musterion," meaning to initiate and keep silent. Ancient mystery cults, like those at Eleusis celebrating Demeter or those in Iron Age Denmark commemorating Nerthus, form the narrative spine of many of Heaney's poems. Whether he is digging up root crops or etymological roots, his purpose is the same: to reestablish contact with the mysterious, productive, but preliterate energies of earth. Again he echoes Vico who, in his discussion of how the Latin *mutus* (mute) was derived from the Greek *mythos*, postulated a proto-language with which the first "theological poets" contemplated the mysteries:

> Thus, in the mute era was born the mental language which, in a golden passage, Strabo says existed before vocal or articulated language: whence λογος signifies both "idea" and "word." And it was appropriate that divine providence should order it thus in such religious times, in view of the eternal property that it is of greater importance to religion that one should meditate it than that one should speak of it.[27]

Once beyond philology and Anglo-Saxon devices, like kennings, Heaney also stands in mute recognition before the Gaelic "love-nest," remembering the sacred fertility goddess of Ireland through her emblem in the grass.

Heaney's etymological poems are rituals that re-create the bond between word and root, place name and sacred earth. "Etymologist," in fact, means a "studier of roots." Latin Stoics such as Varro during the first century A.D. claimed that by discovering the original forms of words, called *etyma* or roots, the precise correspondence between reality and language could be ascertained. Greek Stoics, by contrast, envisioned the *logos* (both word and reason) rooted in the divine mind or *nous*. In his *History in English Words*, a book Heaney had perused during his university days, Owen Barfield explains that the Greeks

> were the first to make the progressive incarnation of thought in audible sound a part of the creative working of God in the world;

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> and it is to them accordingly, with their deep sense of the divine significance of words and their origin, that we owe the word *etymology*, the first half of which is composed of a poetical Greek adjective meaning "true."[28]

For Heaney the sacred *nous* is less highfalutin. It is the vaginal "love-nest," the earth's procreative oracle, as well as any imagination that repeats in the finite mind the original act of creation, as Coleridge and Joyce believed. To Heaney's naturalistic perspective, nature is both original poet and divine inspirer. The human imagination reads the sounds and images in her divine book and transliterates them into intelligible symbols.

In "The Backword Look," a poem in the middle of *Wintering Out* whose title comes from Eliot's "The backward look behind the assurance / Of recorded history, the backward half look / Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror" ("The Dry Salvages"), Heaney looks back to the sort of primitive poetic sensibility Vico believed the first humans possessed as they attempted to translate nature's signs into their own tongue. The poem begins like Yeats's "Leda and the Swan," with a sudden beating of wings, but the mysterious silence, the "mu-sterion" ("as if a language failed"), initiates a mundane, poetic annunciation rather than an apocalyptically historical one. Yeats's divine swan is reduced to a common snipe, but it still has a significant linguistic message for the transcribing poet:

> A snipe's bleat is fleeing
> its nesting ground
> into dialects,
> into variants,
>
> transliterations whirr
> on the nature reserves -
> *little goat of the air,*
> *of the evening,*
>
> *little goat of the frost.*

For the poetic naturalist, as for Vico's onomatopoeic Adam, nature is a living text to emulate. If one looks and listens: "It is his tail-feathers / drumming elegies / in the slipstream // of wild goose / and yellow bittern." Heaney's exploration into the origins of poetic language, however, ends as Shelley's "Ode to a Skylark" ends, with the bird transcending words and cognition altogether. This may be a mute obeisance to a sacred source (the "nesting ground" again) or a simple

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acknowledgment that linguists are mystified by language's origins. His concluding twilit scene offers an oblique self-portrait, in which he is a composite of archaeologist, etymologist, turf-cutter, and initiate into mysteries. He records the Irish bird music

> disappearing among
> gleanings and leavings
> in the combs
> of a fieldworkers's archive.

The generative source of language may be absent, but like the original vegetation and sunshine that produced the peat, or the original flutter of inspiration that produced the poem, traces remain in the mute testament of lexicons, in the written record of the archival poem itself.

Encoded in Heaney's digression on the poetic origins of language is the history of a specific language's decline. With characteristic economy and skill, he writes an elegy for Gaelic, pointing to the battle of the Boyne as a turning point in its fate, and modern sectarian violence as one of the consequences of its suppression. Much of the poem's message derives from the philological work of John Braidwood. Referring to the early influence of Owen Barfield and Braidwood, Heaney has commented: "I did own Barfield, but the more important imprinting was a first arts course in the history of the English language, given by Professor John Braidwood at Queen's University. That covered the ground from Anglo-Saxon up to Ulster English, and wakened something in me."[29]

On April 23, 1969, shortly before Heaney left Queen's, Braidwood delivered a lecture containing the material that would reappear in Heaney's poem (as well as in "Traditions," "Serenades," and "Broagh"). For instance, Braidwood explains: "Some of the most imaginative bird names are translation loans from Irish—*Little Goat of the Evening* [gabhairin oidhche] or *Air Goat* [mionnan aeir] for the snipe, from its plaintive call (in Munster it is called *gonreen-roe* [gabhairin reo, little goat of the frost])."[30] Braidwood shows how the three main dialects in Ulster conform to a pattern of invasion by the land-hungry, pioneering Scots and English, and how "dialect, or local accent, is the mark of our history on our tongues,"[31] causing sympathy or suspicion depending on the allegiances of those spoken to.

In Heaney's politicized account he imagines the British snipe "fleeing / its nesting ground," its indigenous Irish, English, or Scottish roots, and scattering "imaginative bird names" among different dialects that no longer recall their original Gaelic forms. The Gaelic names have been "modernized"; their roots lie in obscure archives where only students

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and scholars tread. The bird's plaintive cry elegizes the "wild geese," the term for those Irish patriots who, when defeated by William III at the Battle of the Boyne and given the choice of taking an oath of allegiance to the king, joining the English army or sailing to France where James had exiled himself, decided to flee to Europe. With the renewal of English dominance in Ireland came renewed efforts to silence the indigenous tongue. Two centuries later, the Gaelic League (founded in 1893) would attempt to resurrect the language, and the Irish Republican Brotherhood, forefathers of the IRA, would add military muscle (ultimately in the form of the Easter Rising of 1916) to their program. Language and politics have been inextricably entangled in Ireland for centuries, and by mapping the snipe's linguistic flight from its original ground in England through Irish *aeir* to the "sniper's eyrie / over twilit earthworks / and wall-steads," Heaney traces the plight of his colonial culture as well. An "eyrie" or "aerie" is either the high nest of a bird of prey (hawk or eagle), its predatory brood, or any high dwelling spot. Heaney's "sniper" is not so much a snipe hunter as a Nationalist or Unionist, preying on enemies below with a rifle. Heaney refrains from taking specific sectarian sides here. Instead he simply bears witness to the terrifying offspring of old crimes, and implicates their "high" idealism in the atrocities they engender, as Eliot did with similar images of birdlike bombers in "Little Gidding" and Geoffrey Hill did with his machine-gunning birds "Feathering blood along the shore" in "Genesis."

As Heaney exhumes the split roots of current words and catalogs ways they have been used, abused, and all but obliterated, he also pays tribute to an oral tradition now eclipsed by print, and the bardic psyche that once regarded words as poetic vehicles of mysterious portent. Owen Barfield writes: "Speech was a more miraculous and rhythmical thing to the Achaians than it is to us today, and whether or no the Gaelic *bard* is cognate with the Greek 'phrazein,' to 'speak,' there is no doubt that 'epos,' the 'word,' had its other meaning of 'poem.'"[32] He could be speaking for Heaney, who often declares words *are* poems. Like Richard Trench, Heaney believes "many a single word . . . is itself a concentrated poem, having stores of poetical thought and imagery laid up in it,"[33] and with Emerson he would agree that words are fossil poems. His linguistic attitudes, however, derive as well from more ancient Gaelic and Anglo-Saxon sources. He writes in "The Sense of Place": "I might have begun the exploration much further back, of course, because in Irish poetry there is a whole genre of writing called *dinnseanchas*, poems and tales which relate the original meanings of place names and constitute a form of mythological etymology."[34]

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Etymology, in Heaney's hands, lays bare the poetic fossil within the linguistic ore.

His mythical approach to words parallels, and is often equivalent to, his attitude toward the landscapes the words depict. He concurs with John Montague that "the Irish landscape . . . is a manuscript which we have lost the skill to read,"[35] and that poets need to reread it so that the old mystical bond between sacred word and sacred place is reaffirmed. For the primitive mind, Heaney declares with obvious nostalgia, the "sensing of place . . . was more or less sacred. The landscape was sacramental, instinct with signs, implying a system of reality beyond the visible realities."[36] Like Yeats, Heaney defies the central, rationalist, technological infrastructure of today and practically deifies yesterday's "foundation for a marvellous or a magical view of the world, a foundation that sustained a . . . structure of love and superstition and half-pagan, half-Christian thought and practice."[37] While this may be another anachronistic attempt to resurrect the fairies of the Celtic Twilight (or the Ulster Twilight, as Heaney playfully calls it), Heaney's commitment to the sacred past seems more down-to-earth than Yeats's. He summons archaeologists and professors of philology to corroborate his myths, rather than Madam Blavatsky or Mohini Chatterjee.

Myth and history are asymptotic for Heaney, and since historical conflicts between Ireland and England date back even further than the Anglo-Saxons (as the Roman Empire declined the Gaels were the notorious invaders, imposing Gaelic on western parts of Roman Britain and dragging off slaves, like the future St. Patrick), it makes sense to draw on both Gaelic and Anglo-Saxon traditions to dramatize these ancient feuds. Having written the etymological poems, "Anahorish," "Toome," and "Broagh," Heaney said:

> that convinced me that one could be faithful to the nature of the English language—for in some senses these poems are erotic mouth-music by and out of the anglo-saxon tongue—and at the same time, be faithful to one's own non-English origin, for me that is County Derry.[38]

As he elaborates his linguistic myth, sexual politics, as Yeats tirelessly demonstrated, comes to stand as a metaphor for national and international politics. Out of the disastrous and fecund unions between Ireland and Britain Heaney aims to make "'vocables': vowels and consonants turning into a harmony of some kind,"[39] so that political ideology resonates from the very sounds that express it.

Sectarian discord and rapprochement are implicit, for example, in a poem like "Anahorish," where Heaney etymologizes in order to

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rediscover the lost Eden of his childhood. Anahorish, a small townland in County Derry near where Heaney grew up, was also the name of a "mixed" Catholic and Protestant primary school which he attended between 1945 and 1951. After the 1956–1962 IRA campaign in Northern Ireland and the resurgence of Catholic and Protestant battles in the late 1960s, his recollection and repetition of the word "Anahorish" is as much a wistful lament for, as well as a happy communion with, past moments of peace. His "place of clear water," which is what Anahorish (anach fhior uisce) means in Gaelic, precipitates a meditation in which his early haunt is compared typologically to both Ararat, "the first hill in the world," and Eden flowing with rivers, "where springs washed into / the shiny grass." Here linguistic differences, and their political and religious correlatives, are unified under the same roof.

When Heaney anatomizes "Anahorish" phonologically—"soft gradiant / of consonant, vowel-meadow"—he underscores the fact that here, as in Blake's Eden, oppositions interpenetrated creatively (as if Adam's phallic "gradiant" were embedded in Eve's "meadow"). Although he redeems the place name's Gaelic meaning, he acknowledges through archaeological puns on "barrows" (wheelbarrows as well as mounds erected over Viking graves) and "mound-dwellers" (field-workers as well as prehistoric Scandinavian "mound people"—such as those described in P. V. Glob's *The Mound People*) that this original paradise is dead and buried. Only the "after-image" lingers on. The paradisal "first hill" has metamorphosed into a Golgotha of ruins. "Dunghills" at the poem's end suggest decay, just as "winter evenings," "mist," and "ice" denote the eclipse of a once vibrant life. The mound dwellers seem to persist in an eerie, posthumous twilight, a landscape of memory as obscure as the place name intoned to resurrect it. Like one of the dead spirits, Heaney returns to elegize vanished felicities.

A similar progression from intoned word to detritus occurs in "Toome," the name of a small townland in County Derry near Mossbawn, the farm where Heaney grew up. It is also one of the oldest inhabited areas of Ireland, the site of major archaeological finds, where prehistoric relics mingle with the musket balls of Wolfe Tone's United Irishmen, the revolutionary (and ecumenical) ancestors of the IRA who fought government troops in the Rebellion of 1798. "Toome" functions as a talisman, a secret password uttered at an oracular passageway into the underworld. In Heaney's clever conceit, sibylline cave and oracular mouth are one. But as so often in his poetry a force no less powerful than dynamite is needed to resurrect speech from "the slab of the

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tongue." The chanted "*Toome, Toome*" mimics the booms or "soft blastings" that break the tomb-like trance so that the mind can utter its findings. If the Sibyl once gazed into the future and told Aeneas in a cave at Cumae that terrible destruction would precede the founding of Rome, Heaney's sibylline archaeologist gazes backward and confirms that destruction is the inevitable consequence of all imperial quests and conquests:

> I push into a souterrain
> prospecting what new
> in a hundred centuries'
>
> loam, flints, musket-balls
> fragmented ware,
> torcs and fish-bones . . .

Rebel musket-flints lie beside Stone Age flints and Viking torcs. The souterrain (the ancient underground chambers first built in Ireland during the late Bronze Age [1000–500B.C.], but which were also "constructed during the Early Christian period and may have been used, if not actually constructed, in Medieval times"[40]), harmonize strangely with Wolfe Tone's Irishmen, who were forced "underground" in 1794, and the IRA, who rekindled their "underground" campaign in 1970 (two years before the poem was written). In *Antiquities of the Irish Countryside*, a book that provided Heaney with much of the archaeological information found in *Wintering Out* and later volumes, Sean O'Riordain confirms that "some ancient souterrains were used as hiding places or deposits for 'dumps' of arms during the recent periods of fighting in Ireland,"[41] although this would have been before 1942, the date of the book's publication.

It is typical of Heaney to employ words like mantras to open historical vistas and then pass beyond them into wordless astonishment. Like Joyce's Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, who plunges into a similar cave full of "Kraals of slitsucked marrogbones" at the beginning of *Finnegans Wake*, and in a hilariously incoherent dialogue between Mutt and Jute explores his as well as Ireland's embattled heritage, Heaney at the end of "Toome" descends again into stone-like silence. Resembling Mutt, who asks Jute at the end of their deaf-mute dialogue, "Ore you astoneaged, jute you?" and Jute, the foreign invader, who replies, "Oye am thonthorstrok, thing mud" (aligning himself with Scandinavian gods and political organizations as well as Vico's theological poets who arose from the mud and imitated thunder in their speech), Heaney is also "astonied" by history's ineffable origins and

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outrageous events. His plunge into "alluvial mud that shelves / suddenly under / bogwater and tributaries" culminates in a communion with an old Celtic goddess, who represents both the mystery of all being and the nightmarish aspect of Irish history.

As Heaney is initiated into the mysteries of the underworld, he keeps quiet, but surprisingly portrays himself in terms of a Medusa; "elvers trail my hair," he declares. The image may have come from Anne Ross's *Pagan Celtic Britain*, which he had read before writing the poem and which reveals that Medusa heads were originally solar symbols for the early Celts, but later became associated with evil-averting guardians and healing springs. For Heaney the Medusa is a symbol for Mother Ireland, whose "terrible beauty" can turn even the most well-intentioned hearts to sacrificial stone, as well as heal them. For him the most fecund ditch of all is the "alluvial mud" that betokens a time before all human habitation and slaughter. Having mined "a hundred centuries' / loam" (Ireland has been inhabited for only the last sixty-four centuries), Heaney disinters a primordial intelligence of earth, a genius loci, a goddess who engenders Irish life and preserves it when it falls. Head cults were endemic in pagan Ireland. Ross explains: "The Celts seem truly to have venerated a 'god head,' and they imbued the 'tête coupée' with all the qualities and powers most admired and desired by them—fertility, prophecy, hospitality, wisdom and healing."[42] Humbled and perplexed into meditative silence, Heaney for a moment assumes the mask of the paradoxical "god head."

As he continues to dream of a common language which, like "Anahorish," reconciles potentially murderous oppositions, or like "Toome" traces historical alliances between Irish Protestant and Irish Catholic (for example, Wolfe Tone's United Irishmen), he consistently elegizes such ideal marriages from the position of a man engulfed by the recent Troubles. His point of view is "Catholic" in the secular rather than sectarian sense; it is all-encompassing. In his revealing essay, "Place, Pastness, Poems: a Triptych," right after praising "Wolfe Tone, our enlightenment revolutionary and founding father of Irish Republicanism,"[43] he suggests how his archaeological interests derive from similar urges to unite differences in an enlightened "catholic" myth:

> "My neighbor," the catechism declared, "is all mankind." So I think of my mesolithic Ulster neighbor, and of his flint flakes, flint spears and arrowheads which were found in abundance at New Ferry on the River Bann. . . . I do not say that a sense of the mesolithic ancestor could solve the religio-political conflicts of the

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> Bann Valley but I do say that it could significantly widen the terms of the answer which each side could give to the question, "who do you think you are."[44]

Later, in discussing how symbolist theory awakened in him the notion that historical events were inextricably grafted onto the actual words that described them, again he dwells on unities:

> The idea that each vocable, each phonetic signal, contains a transmission from some Ur-speech and at the same time is wafted to us across centuries of speaking and writing, that the auditory imagination unites the most ancient and most civilized mentalities, this has been one of the most influential refinements of poetic theory during the last century.[45]

His allegories of unity, division, and reconciliation take their impetus from this refinement.

In "Broagh" he again dissects a word in order to map the fate of Protestant and Catholic divisions in Northern Ireland. In his discussion with Elgy Gillespie, Heaney said of the place name's title: "Protestant and Catholic can say it perfectly in this part of the world. Yet the Protestant won't be entranced by its Gaelic music. He'll think of the *gh* sound perhaps, as in Scottish."[46] The word, in fact, is already an anglicization of the Gaelic *bruach*, and as Foster points out: "the velar fricative *gh* (pronounced ch [x]) was [not simply] a native Irish rather than English sound that was adopted by the Scots planters, but in fact it was also an English sound that disappeared early in the Modern English Period."[47] Nevertheless, Heaney remarks: "The English can't altogether manage that last *gh* sound, that gutteral slither. . . . If I can write the right poem about Broagh it might be a miniscule definition, getting in affection, elegy, exclusiveness. . . . I mean it might touch intimately, though not spectacularly, the nerve of history and culture."[48]

Like Eliot, who employed archaic Sanskrit words in *The Waste Land* to commemorate Western culture's dying roots, Heaney also uses etymology to chart historical uprootings, but of a specifically Irish culture. As Corcoran has shown, one can detect in "rigs" (Scottish for furrows), "docken" (Scottish for docks), and "boortrees" (old Scottish for elders) invasions by seventeenth-century Scottish planters, and the subsequent dispossession and oppression of native Catholics. "The long rigs / ending in broad docken" gesture emblematically to a prelapsarian fertility now gone. The garden in the second stanza whose cultivated soil has been bruised, cut, and scarred, attests to the falls and redemptions of Heaney's culture:

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The garden mould
bruised easily, the shower
gathering in your heelmark
was the black O

in *Broagh*,
its low tattoo
among the windy boortrees
and rhubarb-blades

ended almost
suddenly, like the last
gh the strangers found
difficult to manage.

The strangers are undoubtedly English or Scottish, although they could be any foreigners. In the garden of language, where the original significances of words (like their original stamps or prints) inevitably get soiled and worn smooth, the poet must play redeemer. Purifying the language, like restoring Eden, may be a futile task, but every new poet enters the garden to try out his tools.

Like so many of his mythologizing forebears, Heaney thinks of Irish earth and culture as a giant body, whose language reveals symptoms of historical contusions. "In handling the English language," Geoffrey Hill once said, "the poet makes an act of recognition that etymology is history. The history of creation and the debasement of words is a paradigm of the loss of the kingdom of innocence and original justice."[49] Like Hill, Heaney bears witness to the idea of an original state of innocence and justice, to an Ur-speech and dialect that connotes cultural harmony, which has been consistently shattered. When Heaney, in turn, writes on Hill in "Englands of the Mind," claiming that he possesses "something of Stephen Dedalus's hyperconsciousness of words as physical sensations, as sounds to be plumbed, as weights on the tongue,"[50] he may also be recalling Hill's contention that the poet must address the gravitational "weight" of language—its heaviness, its perpetual tendency to slump into imperfection and decay—and strive for "at-one-ment" between the poem and the words that threaten to undermine it. In "Broagh" Heaney displays language as a "tattooed" body, stained and mortal as the humans who create and trample it, and thereby sets the poem at one with its "fallen" components.

From seemingly innocent words Heaney can detect a whole array of political and religious affiliations and afflictions. For example, if a man says "'He's very staunch,'" according to Heaney, "You can be sure

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your man is a true-blue, sash-wearing, Newsletter-reading, grass roots unionist."[51] In "The Wool Trade" he employs a new metaphor for the deceptive innocuousness of the English language and the historical injustices woven into it. He begins with an epigraph from Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist*, where Stephen makes his famous pronouncement on the language of the English Jesuit instructor: "How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master*, on his lips and on mine!" which comes from the longer passage:

> The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. . . . I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.[52]

For Dedalus, a nightmarish history lurks in the shadow of his master's speech. English is his hair shirt, and he will evolve ever more elaborate ways to wriggle free of it. For Heaney in "The Wool Trade" it is a kind of hair shirt, too, made out of "tweed, / A stiff cloth with flecks of blood." He traces his jacket's strands back to British and Irish entanglements, to the time of the Penal Laws, which excluded Catholics from parliament, the military, the legal profession, academic positions, and even from buying land or owning a horse worth more than five pounds. In the year these laws were passed (1699), England also prohibited the export of woolens to any country except England. In protecting its own foreign markets from competition it virtually destroyed the wool trade in Ireland and hurt further industrial growth by dissuading investment. To sell wool to countries in Europe, Ireland had to resort to smuggling. As England's injustices intensified, writers like Jonathan Swift reacted with vehemence: "Ireland would never be happy till a law were made for burning everything that came from England, except their people and their coals . . . nor am I yet for lessening the number of those exceptions."[53]

Heaney's attack is more oblique. He could be referring to the smuggling wool merchants in his portrait of "square-set men in tunics / who plied soft names like Bruges // In their talk, merchants / Back from the Netherlands." The soft Belgian place name suggests alliances with Gaelic Ireland rather than with hard, consonantal English. When the man of presumably Protestant and English descent (actually a man from southwest England involved in the Shroud Festival, 1968–1969, whom Heaney recollects as Paige Smith) utters the phrase, "the wool trade," Heaney experiences a shock of Irish recognition, and recoils from the memory of English imperiousness. The Englishman's phrase is a fleece,

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raw material for the Irish poet "To shear, to bale and bleach and card" in linguistic meditation. It is "raw" and "confused" because the speaker, unlike Heaney, is not self-conscious enough to realize the historical perversities it contains.

The text and textile Heaney weaves is "Unwound from the spools" of the other man's vowels, as he steals back his Gaelic inheritance. With the vowels, however, come Anglo-Saxon consonants that conjure up memories of bloodshed. His emotional apostrophe at the end expresses both shock and elegiac despair at the fact that all acts of union between Ireland and England have been soaked in blood:

> O all the hamlets where
> Hills and flocks and streams conspired
>
> To a language of waterwheels,
> A lost syntax of looms and spindles,
>
> How they hang
> Fading, in the gallery of the tongue!

The way "The Wool Trade" analyzes the words, sounds, and procedures inherent in its own making is typical of Heaney's more general self-consciousness as a member of the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland and an "inner émigré." But as a writer he never feels at home wherever he is. As he explained to an American reporter for the *Boston Phoenix*: "Everybody's in exile to start with, everybody who writes. Especially if you're in the minority, you're in two places at once at the very beginning. . . . I never had a feeling of comfortable consonance between myself and a place. The travel reinforces a condition that would be there anyway."[54] An inveterate exile, like Dedalus Heaney will master the language once meant to enslave him. He will declare his independence from all masters, whether political or literary. Of Joyce, Heaney remarked: "His achievement reminds me that English is by now not so much an imperial humiliation as a native weapon."[55] He too turns the language of his ancestral foes against them, and against himself as well.

It is "civilized" "masterly" English masking ancient and modern antagonisms that Heaney, following Joyce, bristles against. "The Wool Trade" was originally entitled "Tweed," an apt emblem for the deceptive decorum of scholarly masters. The etymology of "tweed" characteristically reveals historical entanglements. The word has Scottish and English origins; it came from Scotland but insinuated itself into English through a misreading of *tweel*, a Scottish form of *twill*.

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Twilled woolen cloth, which is still chiefly made in southern Scotland, in Heaney's hands unravels into a testament of multiple mistakes and crimes. Although the emperor's clothes are all too visible on Heaney, by unstitching and restitching them he makes what could be an unconscionable straitjacket into a conscious symbol of historical constrictions. His "twilling" of etymology, history, and myth is ultimately an elegy for a "kingdom of innocence and original justice," whose bloody fall is dyed in the very wool used to sew it up.

Heaney's metaphors for the linguistic invasion foisted by Scotland and England upon Ireland are legion. Typically he imagines Ireland as innocent maiden compromised by imperial insurgents. When he begins "Traditions": "Our guttural muse / was bulled long ago / by the alliterative tradition," Anglo-Saxon assumes the dimensions of a mythical bull, as Zeus often did, that despoils the feminine Gaelic muse. Unlike Yeats, who dramatized a similar coupling in "Leda and the Swan," Heaney recounts the plunder and decline of Gaelic with more sardonic fatalism than tragic joy. When he declares "custom, that 'most / sovereign mistress,' / beds us down into / the British isles," he is not only recalling the Duke's description of opinion as a "sovereign mistress of effects" in *Othello* (I.iii.224) and Othello's acceptance of "tyrant custom," which has turned his lover's bed into "the flinty and steel couch of war" (I.iii.229), but also the fact that after the initial bulling and bullying, the tyrant language—English—has been accepted with dire consequences as an accustomed institution. The fusion of sexual and military politics in *Othello* provided Heaney with an illustration of custom's ambiguous power. In the scene he refers to, Othello and Desdemona have just explained their love to the girl's irate father, Brabantio, who disapproves of his daughter's liaison with the black Moor. But as soon as domestic troubles are smoothed over, Othello agrees to abandon his new wife to wage war against the Turks, which, according to "opinion" and "custom," he is eminently qualified to do. "Traditions" picks up this tale of turmoil in domestic and foreign affairs, and shows how Irish traditions also precipitate wars and afflict the possibilities for peaceful "marriages" between opposed racial, religious, and national groups.

When Heaney declares, "We are to be proud / of our Elizabethan English," his sarcasm recalls traditional Irish conflicts as well as lessons learned in John Braidwood's philology course at Queen's. In his explanation of the Colonial Lag—the "post-colonial survivals of mother-country culture"—Braidwood points out: "It is this colonial lag which has led more than one devout Ulsterman to proclaim that 'pure'

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Elizabethan English can be heard in Ulster to this day." But "pure Elizabethan" is a jingoistic illusion. Braidwood challenges: "There never was such a thing as 'pure' Elizabethan English; Queen Elizabeth would probably have sounded Cockney to our ears."[56] Although Elizabeth was the "sovereign mistress" mythically extolled by Spenser as the Faerie Queene, with regard to Ireland her motives, whether linguistic, political, or religious, were hardly "pure." The Act of Supremacy made her dictatorial head of the Irish Church; her Act of Uniformity enforced English by means of the Church onto a largely uncomprehending and resentful Gaelic population. Spenser helped implement her peremptory orders, and he duly surfaces at the end of Heaney's poem in the phrase "anatomies of death" (from *A View of the Present State of Ireland*).

If Spenser had his way, Irish patriots would be crushed until they spoke "like ghosts crying out of their graves." According to Heaney's scheme, "MacMorris gallivanting / round the Globe" (a character in Shakespeare's *Henry V*) begins a complex but affirmative quest for cultural identity with his question, "What ish my nation?" (*Henry V*. III.ii.113), although his answer in the play is anything but complimentary: Ireland "Ish a villain and a bastard, and a knave, and a rascal" (III.ii.114). That other Odyssean questor, Leopold Bloom, appears at the end of "Traditions" to reaffirm his as well as his country's divided past. He seeks to rectify its confusions with his blunt, unembarrassed statement of his citizenship in "'Ireland' . . . / 'I was born here. Ireland.'" When Heaney alludes to the "consonants of lowlanders / shuttling obstinately / between bawn and mossland" he recalls his own divisions between traditions of English colonists (whose fortified farmhouses were "bawns") and Scottish planters (who called bogland "mossland"). Like his family's first farm, "Mossbawn," his poetry is situated, sometimes comically, sometimes tragically, on the militarized boundary between native and foreign domains.

It is also divided between traditional feminine and masculine ways of engaging with the world. Although the allegorical attribution of "feminine" qualities to Ireland and "masculine" qualities to England appears antifeminist in intention, Heaney's attack on the age-old hierarchies, once he pins them down, is feminist in sentiment. If language is a repository of petrified sexual and political discriminations, like a bog full of preserved bones and logs, Heaney is conservative only insofar as he is preoccupied with investigating reliquary forms. His linguistic myths, in fact, are usually anti-mythological; what he resurrects with one hand he deconstructs with the other. If Catholic

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Ireland is Virgin Mary and Gaelic muse, soft and pliable before the onslaught of England's Protestant, patriarchal Jehovah or bullish Zeus, Heaney's goal is to feminize England and masculinize Ireland. Like Jung, his mentor in these matters, he espouses "a symbolic resolution of opposing truths,"[57] both in his poetics and in his politics.

How he plans to accomplish this "resolution," and whether he even intends to make his mythopoeic scenarios concretely political, has often aroused acrimonious debate. In "The Other Side" he imagines his Protestant neighbor as an archetypal patriarch, one of the fiery Calvinist offsprings of Moses (like his earlier "Docker") who, having declared himself "elect" and his tribe the "chosen people," dictates commandments from on high and then turns away "towards his promised furrows." After struggling to absorb "each patriarchal dictum" Heaney, in the role of matriarchal and Mariolatrous Catholic, wonders whether he should talk about such inanities as "the weather // or the price of grass seed" to defuse the potentially explosive situation. Or should he just "slip away" into artistic "silence, exile and cunning"? At the poem's end his various options are quietly suspended rather than forcefully resolved. He refrains from laying down political directives for himself or for anyone else.

A more politically aggressive poem in *Wintering Out* is the aptly titled "A New Song." Like the earlier place-name poems, it records a multifaceted epiphany suggested, in this case, by Derrygarve, the name of a river flowing out of the Moyola River (close to Heaney's early home, Mossbawn). The allegorical waters are sacred, feminine, Irish; they contain and dispense sustenance to a land subverted and broken up by patriarchal British planters. On a linguistic level, the rivers represent the fluent Gaelic speakers of the past (their stones are like "black molars" in their mouths), whose vowels have been dammed up by foreign consonants. The Irish voice is pure, virginal; Derrygarve is a "smooth libation" poured by the "vestal daughter." The river is reminiscent of the girl Heaney meets as well as the flowing name she pronounces. The poem is a marriage song between himself and the river-girl which, in this case, turns out to be combative rather than submissive. It admonishes the Irish to rise up, as in a flood, and "embrace" their adversaries in order to repossess pilfered ground:

> But now our river tongues must rise
> From licking deep in native haunts
> To flood, with vowelling embrace,
> Demesnes staked out in consonants.

In his essay "1972" Heaney sketches the relevant geography of this:

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> I was symbolically placed between the marks of English influence and the lure of the native experience, between the "demesne" and "the bog." The demesne was Moyola Park, an estate now occupied by Lord Moyola . . . ex-Unionist Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. The bog was a wide apron of swamp on the west bank of the River Bann.[58]

Heaney finishes by addressing further emblems of British dominance: townlands, plantations, fortified "bawns" and "bleaching greens" used by planters in their flax and linen work:

> And Castledawson we'll enlist
> And Upperlands, each planted bawn—
> Like bleaching-greens resumed by grass—
> A vocable, as rath and bullaun.

To "enlist" these names, and from them form a unified phalanx, indicates Heaney's desire to fight for unities on Irish soil. The greening of Northern Ireland is seen as a "resumption" of an original green once bleached by intruders. If "the demesne was walled, wooded, beyond our ken," as Heaney says in his reminiscence, and the bawns "dropped on the country like the jaws of a man-trap" his "new song" wants the walls down and the traps opened. "My hope is that the poems will be vocables adequate to my whole experience,"[59] he declares. At the end of his poem, however, his vocables are distinctly Irish; "rath" is a Gaelic hill-fort, "bullaun" a ritual Gaelic basin stone. In his etymological tale of two cultures, he grants a privileged place to the embattled native Irish. He acknowledges the rights of the heirs of Protestant conquerors, but challenges them to practice a similar openness toward the native Irish.

Although Heaney tempers his philological myths with a conscience attuned to the lessons of history, an underlying myth persistently asserts itself. The sacred water of the "bullaun," the pure rivers, the spontaneous fertility of the earth goddess, the liquid vowels, are all associated with an Eden in which Irish is the lingua franca. His allegorical narrative retells the biblical story of fall and redemption. But the presumption that Gaelic is the original Edenic tongue corrupted by a rapacious English invader can be misleading. Tom Paulin, in his interesting "New Look at the Language Question," acknowledges that "In Ireland, the English language has been traditionally regarded as an imposed colonial tongue and Irish as the autochthonous language of the island." In the nineteenth century, when English became equated with freedom and a lucrative future in America, and Gaelic with obstacles to progress, traditional views toward Gaelic changed. Irish "parents encouraged their children to learn English as this would help

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them make new lives in America," and English was enthroned as the "autochthonous language," not because of "any law or official regulation" but because of a "social self-generated movement of collective behaviour among the people." Later, with the founding of the Gaelic League and the Easter Rebellion, Irish "was reinstated as the national language."[60] The myth of the originality of Irish and the sins committed against it, as Paulin demonstrates, has a history of its own.

Political history, however, debunks the myth of an original, innocent Gaelic by revealing that it played postlapsarian oppressor too. Around 700 B.C. Celts, or *Galli* as the Romans called them, speaking a language close to modern Irish, invaded and conquered central Europe. Empowered by well-made iron weapons, they expanded into Asia Minor, into western Europe, and finally into Britain and Ireland. When the Romans invaded Britain, Agricola (alluded to in Heaney's *North*) gazed over at Ireland from Scotland, convinced he could break the island's resistance with a single legion, but in the end stayed away. Seizing this as their opportunity, the Gaels crossed the Irish Sea, harassed the declining Romans, and imposed their authority and language on Britain's coast. Heaney's allegory might be constructed differently to account for different historical facts. He selects the history and myths that express most emphatically his dilemmas as a Catholic brought up amid the sectarian frictions of Northern Ireland.

Mythopoeic poets are usually autobiographers in disguise, yet Heaney is not simply promoting Catholic and Nationalist ideologies by linking his Irish roots with a prelapsarian Eden. As he dwells on those place names and archaeological names with English, Scottish, and Irish origins, he records a pastoral Gaelic past that perhaps never existed, but documents Catholic falls that certainly have. If British planter plays antithesis to his native Irish thesis, he always aims for a dialectical synthesis. His allegorical symbols and etymological myths are meant to highlight the present Troubles against a more fertile, unified background. His ideal ground may be one of time's fictions, bred out of nostalgia and political idealism, but as Heaney readily admits, the narratives he fashions have a figurative rather than a literal truth. With consummate lyrical skill, he fashions preferable alternatives to the bloody cycles of attack and revenge that have afflicted Irish history from the start.

[1] Seamus Heaney, talk with Elgy Gillespie, "A Political Stance," *Irish Times*, 19 May 1972, p. 10.

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[10] Seamus Heaney, "Old Derry's Walls," *Listener*, 24 Oct. 1968, p. 522.
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[16] *Ibid.*, p. 104.
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[29] Letter to the author, 4 June 1987.
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[33] Richard Trench, in Arsleff, *The Study of Language*, p. 243.
[34] Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations* (London: Faber, 1980), p. 131.
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[37] *Ibid.*, p. 133.
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[39] Seamus Heaney, "Poets on Poetry," *Listener*, 8 Nov. 1973, p. 629.
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[44] *Ibid.*, p. 37.
[45] *Ibid.*, pp. 38–39.
[46] Heaney, in "A Political Stance," p. 10.
[47] Foster, "The Poetry of Seamus Heaney," p. 48.
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[59] *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 36, 37.
[60] Tom Paulin, in *Ireland's Field Day* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1986), all quotes on p. 10.

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ABBREVIATIONS FOR BOOKS BY WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

A — *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (1951)

AG — *In the American Grain* (1925)

BU — *The Build Up* (1952)

CP1 — THE COLLECTED POEMS, Volume One, A. Walton Litz and Christopher MacGowan, eds. (1986)

CP2 — THE COLLECTED POEMS, Volume Two, Christopher MacGowan, ed. (1988)

EK — *The Embodiment of Knowledge*, Ron Loewinsohn, ed. (1974)

FD — *The Farmers' Daughters and Other Stories* (1961)

I — IMAGINATIONS, Webster Schott, ed. (1970; contains *Kora in Hell: Improvisations*, 1920; *Spring and All*, 1923; *The Great American Novel*, 1923; *The Descent of Winter*, 1928; *A Novelette [January] and Other Prose*, 1932)

IM — *In the Money* (1940)

Int — *Speaking Straight Ahead: Interviews with William Carlos Williams*, Linda Welshimer Wagner, ed. (1976)

IWWP — *I Wanted to Write a Poem: The Autobiography of the Works of a Poet*, reported and edited by Edith Heal (1958)

ML — *Many Loves and Other Plays* (1961)

P — *Paterson* (1963, contains Books 1–5 and notes for Book 6)

PB — *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* (1962, includes *The Desert Music*, 1954, and *Journey to Love*, 1955)

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RI *A Recognizable Image: William Carlos Williams on Art and Artists*, Bram Dijkstra, ed. (1978)

SE *Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams* (1954)

SL *Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams*, John C. Thirlwall, ed. (1957)

SS *Something to Say: William Carlos Williams on Younger Poets*, James E.B. Breslin, ed. (1985)

VP *A Voyage to Pagany* (1928; new edition, 1970, includes "The Venus")

WM *White Mule* (1937)

Y *Yes, Mrs. Williams* (1959)

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Introduction

Robert Franciosi

Despite the imprimatur of a new edition of his poetry Williams remains the most slighted, even insulted of modern American poets. In a rancorous review of Litz and MacGowan's *Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, Volume One,* Donald Davie calls Williams "the most embarrassing poet in the language, surpassing even Whitman." He concludes: "We are not embarrassed by Williams; we are embarrassed *for* him." There it is—the review Eliot never deigned to write, but that half a century later another critic feels secure in penning. How dismaying that in 1987 the assumptions underlying such taste in poetry still yield so much animosity. But Davie's rise to attack should serve as sobering reminder that many critics who give serious attention to the era's other poets casually neglect Williams.

Davie might have you view the essays published here as the work of deluded followers or cynical careerists. "Serious writing about *Williams*?" I am pleased to offer this issue as, on the one hand, indeed serious response to Davie's assault, and, on the other, as intelligent response to Williams' poetry. The contributors' knowledge, energy, and diversity of approach is typical of today's Williams critics. Their work discredits Davie's stance and, I hope, will challenge readers who have neglected Williams—will challenge them to reread him seriously and to judge for themselves.

In selecting eight essays from the many submitted, I tried to accommodate both scholarly and critical approaches to Williams. The essays by Ahearn, Barry, and MacGowan, based as they are on unpublished materials, indicate that much of great value remains to be mined from the Williams archives—and like the Baroness essay included here, much remains to be published. With MacGowan's edition of *Paterson* scheduled for 1992, we will finally have reliable texts

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for all of the poetry. This is certainly no small matter, as such bibliographic effort enables our critical enterprise, whatever stance we assume.

Naturally, much current Williams criticism reflects advances in contemporary literary studies. The texts which so easily frustrated (or amused) practitioners of the New Criticism now seem to draw the most attention. Perhaps Williams' readers may at last possess critical tools especially relevant to the reading of *Kora in Hell, Spring and All*, and *Paterson*. Indebted to the writings of, among others, Bakhtin, Foucault, and Cixous, and grounded in Marxism, phenomenology, gender studies, language and genre theories, contemporary treatments of Williams often display the best of the new criticisms. Here, the essays by Berry, Conrad, Fredman, Marling, and Sayre offer provocative and fresh treatments of well-known texts—and open possibilities for future work.

Plans for this issue began during a 1987 NEH seminar at Princeton. I wish to thank the NEH for that summer with modern American poetry and Walt Litz for his gracious assistance and counsel. Among many other debts, I owe to Sherman Paul the pleasure of my first serious reading of William Carlos Williams. As much as any scholar I know, he holds to "the advance" in American poetry celebrated by Williams. I dedicate this issue to Sherman Paul upon the occasion of his retirement from the University of Iowa and his assumption of a new life in the Minnesota woods.

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Williams, Eliot, and American Tradition

Stephen Fredman

What do American poets do to get situated as poets? How do they find their bearings or prepare a place for themselves in America, neither wholly inside nor wholly outside European tradition? Although these questions are large and maybe unanswerable, they provide an important context for thinking about an inherent similarity in the stance toward tradition of William Carlos Williams and T. S. Eliot. Regarded for so long as polar opposites within the geography of modernism, both Williams and Eliot engage in appropriations of tradition that demonstrate one of the desperate but productive ways American poets situate themselves. While Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is usually seen as a wholehearted return to European tradition and Williams' *In the American Grain* is taken customarily as a celebration of "true" nativism, both of these readings disregard the crucial issue of placement, in the light of which these works appear as a supplementary pair. Pondering the general issue of tradition by way of these two texts by Williams and Eliot will also allow me to indicate how postmodernism, in the example of Charles Olson, begins to separate itself from modernism through approaching tradition in somewhat different ways.

The sociologist Edward Shils offers a succinct discussion of the centrality of tradition to social life in his book, *Tradition*, which had its inception, coincidentally, as the T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures at the University of Kent. In the preface, Shils places himself in the tradition of Eliot, "whose writings had done so much to arouse and nourish my mind on tradition."[1] However much in sympathy he feels himself with the conservative trend of Eliot's lifelong reflections on tradition, though, Shils is obliged to propose a sociological model of tradition that, in its broadest outlines, differs dramatically from Eliot's notion of

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tradition in his seminal essay. As a social scientist, Shils proposes the widest possible definition of tradition, based upon the Latin word *traditum*—"anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present" (*T*, p. 12). This broader conception of tradition diverges most from the normative notion of tradition that Eliot sought to promote throughout his career, in that, as Shils says, "The conception of tradition as here understood is silent about whether there is acceptable evidence for the truth of the tradition or whether the tradition is accepted without its validity being established. . . . The decisive criterion is that, having been created through human actions, through thought and imagination, it is handed down from one generation to the next" (*T*, p. 12). Using his definition, Shils describes the immense range of *tradita* as including the following:

> material objects, beliefs about all sorts of things, images of persons and events, practices and institutions. It includes buildings, monuments, landscapes, sculptures, paintings, books, tools, machines. It includes all that a society of a given time possesses and which already existed when its present possessors came upon it and which is not solely the product of physical processes in the external world or exclusively the result of ecological and physiological necessity. (*T*, p. 12)

If we apply the definition of tradition proposed by Shils, we must admit that America is saturated with tradition. Shils makes it clear that tradition is the central process of cultural transmission, without which culture would vanish. From the sociological perspective, tradition is an indisputable ingredient in every aspect of our lives. Our placement with respect to tradition, however, as encoded in modern terms like "traditionalism," is another matter. As Shils begins his book by noting, the modern valuation of tradition and the relationship we take toward the past serve to render negligible the prestige of tradition, which in turn undercuts its authorizing function: "The acknowledged normative power of a past practice, arrangement, or belief has become very faint, indeed, it is almost extinguished as an intellectual argument. Correspondingly, the traditionality of a belief, practice, or arrangement offers little resistance to arguments which proceed on the presumption of the efficiency, rationality, expediency, 'up-to-dateness,' or progressiveness of their proposed alternatives" (*T*, p. 1). While Shils portrays a modern attitude toward tradition that extends far beyond America, there is a sense in which America is the flagship of modernity. Launched by the concerted winds of the Reformation and the Enlightenment, America evinces much more thoroughly than does

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Europe the spirit of those antitraditional movements. Americans feel a fundamental uneasiness with tradition and authority, insisting instead upon what we construe as the opposing values of freedom and independence. In doing so, we sacrifice the supportive function that foundational myths supply. Instead of basing our culture on prophets, avatars, or heroes, who, like Prometheus, bring divine fire to mortals, we descend from Founding Fathers who were, like us, without divine sanction and who gave us a law not grounded in absolutes but addressed to a mediate world and to the necessities of adjudication between countervailing claims of interest.

From the standpoint of Shils's broad definition of tradition, America partakes not only of European tradition but of world tradition. In characterizing our attitude toward tradition, though, one might argue that in America antitraditionalism has been handed down as a traditional given. Antitraditionalism does not form just another tradition, however, because it problematizes the grounding or authorizing function of tradition. In other words, while one might well say that America has produced a "tradition of the new," to use Harold Rosenberg's coinage, what this tradition transmits is the condition of anxiety about groundlessness that arises from antitraditionalism. American poets keep asking foundational questions over and over again, wondering whether it is even possible to be a poet in America when the authority for writing is constantly kept in question.

In Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," anxiety and pathos cry out abruptly from the shortest paragraph, whose poignancy is highlighted by its brevity and self-containment. In this paragraph Eliot defines the poet's lot in the following terms: "What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."[2] For what desired good can the poet be willing to extinguish his own personality and sacrifice the conduct of his present life? For tradition. Without tradition, it seems, an individual identity is without meaning and life is not worth living; in order to obtain the treasure of tradition, one eagerly sacrifices life and the sense of self.

Over against the echoes of religious piety, what strikes a reader forcibly is the acute sense of desperation informing Eliot's desire for tradition. Instead of indulging in the Adamic posture of rejoicing in his freedom from the bonds of any anteriority, Eliot, on the contrary, feels imprisoned by the lack of tradition and will resort to any extreme in order to claim belonging. Imagining himself as barred from tradition,

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as if by social class or by lack of providential election, the poet proclaims: "Tradition . . . cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour" (*TT*), p. 38). On the face of it, this statement sounds as if uttered by a stern schoolmaster in frock coat; behind that mask, however, we can hear a call of tremendous yearning, which disguises its desire in the imperative voice, thereby hoping to guarantee fulfillment. The camouflaged call is a prayer: For those without tradition, please make it possible that through our great, penitential labors we may earn it. The puritan Eliot calls the penitential covenant of works he will follow "the historical sense," which is a willing acquiescence to the "compulsion" to flay himself so relentlessly with "the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country [i.e., England]" that its imprint is branded upon whatever he himself writes—as though he could appropriate European tradition by having it tattooed upon his skin.

The "labour" of "obtaining" tradition (does Eliot, like one of James's characters, think that having sweated hard enough under the Protestant work ethic he has the right to buy tradition?) requires the disciplined working through, one by one, of the imposing monuments of European culture—picking up and engaging each one deliberately, passionately, responsibly, appropriating it even to the extent of embodying it in translation or imitation. Every poet handles certain texts in this way, but to do so specifically for the purpose of acquiring tradition is to bring tradition into the *foreground* as a brightly lit, fully accessible object for the appropriation of any person, regardless of her or his *background*. In representing tradition as a series of objects, Eliot occludes from awareness the background function of tradition, its operation as "tacit knowledge" or as hermeneutic "prejudice." In a "traditional" society, one whose sense of tradition remains substantially intact, tradition works in a way precisely the opposite of that expressed by Eliot: tradition is not earned but given. The authority or weight of tradition inheres in this background function, through which the great monuments of the culture are seen as expressing with consummate clarity and force the truths that "everyone" feels. At the same time as recognizing the monumentality and sublimity—the inexhaustibility or at times even unapproachability—of the great works of one's tradition, one also feels an inalienable intimacy with these works merely by virtue of being born into this tradition. When we approach a work from outside our own tradition as if it were a singular figure without a ground, we are able to make little sense of it (like American poets, we are missing our bearings).

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Misunderstanding is an obvious liability in engaging a work outside one's own tradition. But again, we can mistake misunderstanding for a surface matter if we ignore its more subtle and pervasive background quality, which is the sensation of strangeness, of not being at home, felt when encountering a work from another tradition. Having voluntarily exiled ourselves from the authority of European tradition and yet having existed too briefly or too late to establish a tradition of equal depth, authority, and pervasiveness, Americans occupy an uneasy position, which might be called self-estrangement, an estrangement not from particular works thought of as traditional but from the grounding function of tradition itself. The works of the European tradition, like the works of our own American past, are not inaccessible to us, but we have lost the background sense of the "weight" of the traditional object in its society; the objects of European tradition join those of our own history as familiar but uncannily weightless. In his advice to Cid Corman about how to situate his new magazine *Origin* (at a moment in which both poets were setting off on their careers), Charles Olson speaks of the quality of weightlessness, or breathlessness, encountered by the American writer:

> Look: any French writer . . . stands on SCHOLARSHIP of his people (as well as a clear tradition back thru the Latin to the Greek and on back)
>
> he can be interlacktuwal as all hell *because* he has a body of work which he and his readers take for granted, base themselves on (a culture breathes, takes breath for granted, as men do)
>
> but such breath has been worked for, milleniums, my lad
>
> DO YOU HONESTLY THINK—or know, for that matter—ANY AMERICAN CAN GO ON SUCH ASSUMPTION?
>
> Have you *any* sanctions for your acts?
> *Even* for editing a MAG?[3]

Stanley Cavell, the contemporary philosopher most finely attuned to the central dilemmas of American culture, also notes the unsanctioned, ephemeral quality of our intellectual life:

> I think a . . . cultural difference between American and European intellectual life is that the American (with isolated exceptions) has no sacred intellectual texts, none whose authority the intellectual community at large is anxious to preserve at all costs—no Marxian texts, no Freudian, no Hegelian, no Deweyan, and so forth. Every text stands at the level of professional journal articles, open for disposal.[4]

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The American inability to view texts as sacred objects, as manifestations of a primordial ground, accounts for some of the differences in inflection between European and American modernism. The relationship of the writer to tradition in, for example, Joyce's *Ulysses* and Broch's *The Death of Virgil* is quite different from that relationship in Pound's *Cantos* and Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Through excision or imitation, the Americans assemble pieces of tradition onto a flat, spatially organized plane, while the Europeans use the resonant background of tradition as an inexhaustible material upon which to work ever-new inventions. Eliot seems to recognize that without the grounding function of tradition intact one is left with merely the isolate objects of tradition; in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" he endeavors to devise a notion of tradition based upon an ideal coherence of the individual works within it. The American poet would appropriate this ideal coherence, thus gaining a substitute for the background sense of tradition as tacit authorization from which he feels exiled—as though by constructing a map he will have prepared a place for himself. Eliot imagines a tradition that "has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order," and then he plots out his position within this simultaneity:

> The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted. . . . Whoever has approved of this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. (*TT*, pp. 38–39)

In this cubist view, tradition is spatialized as a revisable collage, neither temporally grounded nor unalterably fixed but rather laid out as a simultaneous visual arrangement, capable both of supporting and of being recast by the "really new" work of art. No one will deny that traditions change, but to speak of tradition spatially as a "form," as though it were a modernist work of art, truly is preposterous. While most people in traditional societies imagine tradition as in important ways unalterable, one might wish to take a historical perspective and imagine it more as a massive inertial force, moving slowly through time, deflected slightly in one direction or another by the addition of a new

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work of art. Eliot's claim that "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" represents not the hermeneutic recognition that our understanding of the past is conditioned by our present perspective but rather the desire of an exiled American to create his own collage, to call to order himself the ground upon which his new production may securely rest. Such a distortion by Eliot of the "traditional" sense of tradition bespeaks a tremendous anxiety about the lack of authorization felt by the poet.

Evincing a comparable anxiety to Eliot's, William Carlos Williams, too, seeks a way to appropriate the past in order to situate himself as a poet. Instead of looking to the monuments of European tradition and to the value of traditionalism, Williams wishes to ground himself in the American continent, which means, in effect, to revise and appropriate the record of past attempts by Europeans and their descendants to situate themselves in America. Of his exemplary hero Daniel Boone Williams says, "his whole soul, with greatest devotion, was given to the New World which he adored and found, in its every expression, the land of heart's desire" (*AG*, p. 139). Williams, too, in his revisionary history, *In the American Grain*, announces his intention to give "his whole soul" to that "land of heart's desire." Through characterizing the fidelity to place of Boone and the other heroes in his select pantheon, such as Columbus, De Soto, Père Sebastan Rasles, John Paul Jones, Aaron Burr, Sam Houston, and Poe, Williams hopes that the positive qualities he uncovers in this unorthodox band of found(l)ing fathers will redound upon himself and give sanction for his own efforts at placement. In imagination, Williams claims a filial descent from the Daniel Boone whom he introduces in fabulous terms: "There was, thank God, a great voluptuary born to the American settlements against the niggardliness of the damning puritanical tradition; one who by the single logic of his passion, which he rested on the savage life about him, destroyed at its spring that spiritually withering plague" (*AG*, p. 130). Against the notion of Williams as a new Boone, taking his place directly in the "true," voluptuary American lineage, Henry Seidel Canby, in "Back to the Indian," the first review of *In the American Grain*, notes perceptively that Williams' version of "noble savagery" has a Parisian rather than an American flavor. Canby dryly portrays Williams as "an American poet and modernist, who surveys his home from the perspective of Paris," and ends his review by lecturing Williams in stern terms: "There is undoubtedly much to cause discontent in the spectacle of America as the fatted calf among the nations, but to choose

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rampageous Indians and political reprobates as ancestral models by way of a change from puritans, Quakers, and Virginia gentlemen is to strike a Parisian attitude which seems a little absurd in New York."[5]

In confirmation of Canby's accusation, we can note that *In the American Grain* is the only book that Williams, the staunch "non-expatriate," composed, in large measure, outside the United States. As one critic has argued, "We might even speculate that *In the American Grain* could not have been written in Rutherford, that he required this separation to look carefully at the texture of American culture resident in him. Williams suggested this possibility when he wrote . . . that 'all values have grown much simpler for me since I have hit Paris.'"[6] Although this simplification of values seems to be the object of Canby's scorn, isn't the "simple" condemnation of puritanism as much an American peculiarity as puritanism itself? Alert to the issue that Canby raises, Williams records within his text a confrontation with Parisian values that helped to solidify his decidedly American intent in writing *In the American Grain*. As he had done earlier with his quotations from and responses to his fellow poets in "The Return of the Sun," the prologue to *Kora in Hell*, and as he was to do most memorably through the "Cress" letters in *Paterson*, Williams introduced directly into his text the confrontational voice of another speaker—in this case the French writer Valéry Larbaud. Williams allows Larbaud to comment upon the provincialism of Williams' own diatribe against puritanism, and thus he can partially disarm in advance a Canby's criticism. But more importantly, this dialogue functions as a way for Williams to maintain that his central concern is neither with an "objective" history of America nor with a distanced "appreciation" of its conflicting elements (such as Larbaud enjoys) but rather with recuperating particular historical figures whose works and attitudes can supply a groundwork for American culture:

> I said, It is an extraordinary phenomenon that Americans have lost the sense . . . that there is a source in AMERICA for everything we think or do . . . that, in fine, we have no conception at all of what is meant by moral, since we recognize no ground our own—and that this rudeness rests all upon the unstudied character of our beginnings. . . . That unless everything that is, proclaim a ground on which it stand, it has no worth; and that what has been morally, aesthetically worth while in America has rested upon peculiar and discoverable ground. (*AG*, p. 109)

This passage sounds the leitmotivs of the American poetic situation: our inability to recognize ourselves as in possession of a

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ground; the impulse to begin work as a poet by writing a myth of our beginnings through which we can father (or mother) ourselves; and the apprehension that without a ground to stand on, no cultural work has any worth. In an incomplete understanding of what is at stake in "a ground on which it stand," readers have taken the idiosyncratic American history that Williams composed while on his European sabbatical as a fiercely nativist declaration of the necessity for *contact* between the writer and the continent, "the land of heart's desire." J. Hillis Miller has provided an influential formulation of this aspect of the desire for grounding; he speaks of Williams' search for immanence, in the course of which the heart's desire springs forth out of the "formless ground" of the American landscape.[7] But is Miller's "formless ground" the one Williams has in mind here? In the passage quoted above, he decries our formless culture, our rude unstudiedness, and he laments, rather, our lack of "recognizing" a ground, of acknowledging that "there is a source in AMERICA for everything we think or do."

The ground Williams yearns for is not primarily that vast, unknown (and thus feminized, in Williams' imagination) continent that opened before the many explorers whom he takes such pains to characterize; the ground must be constructed from a historical investigation of the exploratory tradition in which Williams would like to situate himself. The ground is textual, the result of a revisionary reading—a fact Williams hints at by speaking of the ground Boone found "to take the place of England" as "the New World which he adored and found, *in its every expression,* the land of heart's desire (*AG*, p. 136, emphasis added). From this perspective, we can see that *In the American Grain* proposes a placement through the construction of an idiosyncratic tradition not unlike that created by Williams' ostensible arch-rival, T. S. Eliot: each American poet feels profoundly unsettled and unsupported, and each endeavors to develop a notion of tradition that will underwrite his own poetic enterprise. I would contend that Williams is most "American" neither in his love for the landscape nor in his nativist rhetoric. He may approach that condition, ironically, by composing (as so many others have done) his American history abroad, but he actually reaches it, like Eliot and every other major American poet since Emerson does, in the creation of an idiosyncratic history to satisfy his abject desire for a tradition of his own to authorize his poetry.

One way in which it would seem that the "new" tradition Williams assembles for *In the American Grain* differs markedly from the "old" tradition Eliot invokes in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is that when it comes to the "morally, aesthetically worth while" in poetry, only

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Edgar Allan Poe makes the grade. Poe, as many commentators have remarked, seems a rather odd choice by Williams for a literary predecessor (isn't he a member of Eliot's team?); from the standpoint of aesthetic principles, Poe the symbolist and Williams the objectivist would appear to have nothing in common. But Williams does not really care about Poe's aesthetics or his style; he is captivated by Poe's acts of situating himself as a writer. While Williams *is* intrigued that Poe claims to have written his poems according to a method (thus obtaining a "scientific" grounding), Williams' real concern lies with Poe's criticism: "The aspect of his critical statements as a whole, from their hundred American titles to the inmost structure of his sentences, is that of a single gesture, not avoiding the trivial, to sweep all worthless chaff aside. It is a movement, first and last to clear the GROUND" (*AG*, p. 216). Poe becomes Williams' exemplary American poet because he is a violent revisionist, a fierce partisan in the battle for a place to stand; Williams admires Poe's tenacity in seeking for principles that could ground American writing and in attacking whatever would obscure those principles. In his own reading of Poe, Williams finds himself having to exercise identical virtues in interpreting his subject: "As with all else in America, the value of Poe's genius to OURSELVES must be *uncovered* from our droppings, or at least uncovered from the 'protection' which it must have raised about itself to have survived in any form among us—where everything is quickly trampled" (*AG*, p. 219).

The Poe that Williams discloses—the relentless critic of all shabby, secondhand imposture in European clothing—does provide a kind of ancestral image for Williams' own project of uncovering the grounds for an American tradition. Williams discerns, for example, that Poe faced factors in the American condition that have not changed materially by Williams' own era; he mentions two factors in particular as impinging upon Poe: "the necessity for a fresh beginning, backed by a native vigor of extraordinary proportions,—with the corollary, that all 'colonial imitation' must be swept aside." Williams will find himself asserting over and over again the necessity for a new "Spring" in American poetry that will express our "native vigor" to the fullest extent, and his disparagement of literary "colonialism" will occupy a major place in his own critical endeavors. Williams also resembled Poe in that he "saw his own despair . . . yet he continued to attack, with amazing genius seeking to discover, and discovering, points of firmness by which to STAND and grasp, against the slipping way they had of holding on in his locality." Speaking for both men, Williams proclaims

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willfully: "Either the New World must be mine as I will have it, or it is a worthless bog. There can be no concession" (*AG*, p. 219). A worthless bog is no place to stand.

Had he chosen to read Eliot as he read Poe, Williams might have seen Eliot, too, as a comrade-in-arms, engaged with anxiety and despair in the revisionary project of clearing away the American ground in order to make a space available for his own work. All three poets entered into the fray armed with little more than self-reliance, seeking to establish a ground that was based upon their own individual judgments; as a revisionist, each poet sought to be "original," as Williams says, "in its legitimate sense of solidity which goes back to the ground, a conviction that he *can* judge within himself" (*AG*, p. 216). For the American poet, grounding is a necessarily revisionist enterprise, in which the poet finds him- or herself in the awkward position of a latecomer to a European tradition that is at once both constitutive of and alien to the conditions out of which the poet writes. Modern European poets inherit similar constraints, but the situation in America seems more extreme because there is even less opportunity to claim that a grounding cultural tradition has ever existed here in the first place. Receiving as their primary legacy this double jeopardy of belatedness and alienation, American poets such as Williams and Eliot construct a tradition using the principles of collage, discriminating fiercely among the objects lying at hand and arranging them in a form that might support their own work.

During the course of *In the American Grain*, Williams argues strenuously the need to do the primary work of rewriting history for oneself: "if there is agreement on one point in history, be sure there's interest to have it so and that's not truth" (*AG*, p. 188). A revisionist history, in Williams' terms, will both look for the motives responsible for repressing a true account of a person's character and also seek to recover that character:

> We can begin by saying: No opinion can be trusted; even the facts may be nothing but a printer's error; but if a verdict be unanimous, it is sure to be a wrong one, a crude rush of the herd which has carried its object before it like a helpless condoning image. If we cannot make a man live again when he is gone, it is boorish to imprison him dead within some narrow definition, when, were he in his shoes before us, we could not do it. It's lies, such history, and dangerous. Just there may lie our one hope for the future, beneath that stone of prejudice. (*AG*, p. 190)

Since identity is multifarious, there can never be only one approach to

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history. Given this understanding, Williams looks for the motives for confining the accounts given of a person's character into a univalent morality play, laying all the blame for such normative history at the door of puritanism, which he sees as the contagion at work in the distortion and defamation of strong American characters. While he purports to restore some of the complexity to our understanding of various historical characters, Williams can make, of course, no claim to disinterestedness, since his own motive is to use historical inquiry to provide a ground for his own productions: "That of the dead which exists in our imaginations has as much fact as have we ourselves. The premise that serves to fix us fixes also that part of them which we remember" (*AG*, p. 189). There can be no clearer statement of the interdependence of a revisionary history and the poetry it authorizes.

But then Williams himself, afraid that his own history could become a "helpless condoning image," balks at the metaphor of fixity; it seems to belie the multifariousness he endeavors to unleash. How can we choose an authorizing image of a past figure and not fall into the "deadening," "imprisoning" discourse of normative historiography? The only way, says Williams, is by acknowledging the provisional nature of our acts of grounding, by continuing to affirm over and over again that the true purpose of history is to make possible new creation. If history is "as it may be, a tyranny over the souls of the dead—and so the imaginations of the living—where lies our greatest well of inspiration, our greatest hope of freedom (since the future is totally blank, if not black) we should guard it doubly from the interlopers" (*AG*, p. 189). When we open up a revisionary history and guard against its appropriation by "interlopers" who wish to reduce it to "some narrow definition," then we have the sort of cleared ground upon which an American poet can hope to write. When Williams proposes this sort of productive history, his imaginary respondent interjects, "You mean, tradition. Yes, nothing there is metaphysical. It is the better part of us all." To which Williams enthusiastically replies, "It is the fountain!" (*AG*, p. 189).

In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and *In the American Grain*, Eliot and Williams attempt to allay their anxiety through the construction of an idiosyncratic tradition intended to keep dynamic and open the ground for the production of each poet's writing. Eliot keeps the ground dynamic and open by imagining a tradition that instead of disdaining eagerly awaits the imposition of the new work of art. Williams keeps the ground dynamic and open by invoking an exploratory tradition of heroic revisionism, always in the process of

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clearing away ideological stagnancy. Whether one imagines gaining access to tradition by aggressive intrusion or by the penitential gambit of passive surrender is beside the point when we realize that the revisionary traditions constructed by each of these poets function identically as idiosyncratic modes of grounding. And it is important to remember that as soon as an image of tradition such as is offered by one of these two poets begins to look like "the" tradition, subsequent American poets have bridled, feeling that it is time for another revisionary intervention.

Having seen how Eliot and Williams rolled out tradition as a map, in hopes of locating themselves somewhere within its coordinates, let us return for one more inspection of the notion of tradition and its relation to modernity. In Edward Shils's endeavor to construct a careful sociological description of tradition and (between the lines) to argue for the sort of traditionalism he sees embodied in T. S. Eliot, he makes it clear how important the authorizing function of tradition is for the continued production of culture. Shils weds together two notions, the objectification of tradition as "things handed down" and the weight of tradition's authority, through his central definition of tradition as the "given." This idea of tradition, however, only achieves articulation in the modern era, where it emerges in the dissatisfaction (called conservative) with the radical rejection of the givenness of tradition by the more enthusiastic proponents of modernism:

> Modern culture is in some respects a titanic and deliberate effort to undo by technology, rationality, and governmental policy the givenness of what came down from the past. . . . Archimedes in the third century B.C. was not ready to accept the given position of the earth in the cosmos; he said, "Give me but one firm spot on which to stand, and I will move the earth." No one ever provided that firm place or fulcrum to Archimedes and so he had to accept as given the position of the earth in the cosmos. Many of the activities undertaken by scientists and governmental officials, technologists and psychologists, are efforts to create the fulcrum so that they can undo, minimize, or annul the influence of what has been given by the past to the present. (*T*, pp. 197–98)

Conservative modernists such as Shils fear the loss of the normative dimension supplied by the givenness of tradition, feeling that the world would be a more pleasant, safer place if we would accept a bit more of what we are given. By emphasizing givenness, though, they join both the radical enthusiasts of change and the vast majority, who are more complacent adherents of change, in conceiving of tradition as a ragbag

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of objects one can either accept or reject. From this perspective, Eliot truly does look paradigmatic: as a modernist thinker he recasts tradition into a set of objects juxtaposable into an authorizing collage; as a poet, he writes the great modernist poem, *The Waste Land*, in which he demonstrates how the modern art of poetry creates its own grounding through a collagist reordering of tradition.

From a sociological perspective one might, by objectifying and enumerating the traditional factors at play within a particular social situation, weigh the influence of tradition and judge the authorizing role that it plays. But does this modernist conception of tradition as "what has been given by the past to the present" exhaust the significance of the term? One might counter the modernist definition by arguing the diametrically opposed position that tradition contains primarily what is withheld by the past from the present. A careful reading of an ancient work of art or writing often discloses a fundamental strangeness (Heidegger is famous for such readings, although not everyone understands what kind of care he exercises), a darkness or hiddenness that refuses to yield to our normal modes of mastering texts. Along with "giving" what we "take for granted," tradition also guards what we are unable to grasp. At its root, tradition itself is constituted by the moment of confrontation with our groundlessness. From this vantage point, what persists in tradition is that which we cannot explain away, for which no interpretation is final, and which never allows us to feel in control. Rather than giving, tradition withholds what matters most, and the struggle of a lifetime is to pry oneself open to an intimation of what tradition guards.

If it is accurate to describe tradition's doubleness as a withholding in the midst of giving, then we can say that modernity fears to face the unsettling quality in tradition, its posing of questions that threaten to take away everything that is "given" in our lives, to deprive us of our place. We could think of modernity as an attempt to control tradition: in the form of what Heidegger calls the *Gestell*, the rigid frame of objectification into which it tries to squeeze all that is, modernity flees from the strangeness of tradition, its radically unsettling effect.[8] In a discussion of Petrarch's understanding of tradition, Gerald Bruns makes this point most forcefully:

> But what Petrarch's recognition of cultural alterity [i.e., that his own world differs decisively from classical antiquity] entails is a statement about the otherness of tradition, that is, the idea that what comes down to us in tradition, what tradition preserves or rather entails, is not a deposit of familiar meanings but

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> something strange and refractory to interpretation, resistant to the present, uncontainable in the given world in which we find ourselves at home, the world that makes sense to us and promises us a future that has a place for us. . . . Tradition is not the persistence of the same; on the contrary, it is the disruption of the same by that which cannot be repressed or subsumed into a familiar category.[9]

We designate as High Modernism the period (roughly from 1890 to 1940) in which the most far-reaching and consummate attempts were made to contain the givens of tradition The primary art form of modernism, as David Antin has argued,[10] was the collage—the "enframing" of a number of given objects—which became a ubiquitous structural principle in the arts and the human sciences (in fact, the term "structural principle" itself bespeaks a collagist epistemology). In the field of American poetry, there have been writers before, after, and even during (such as H. D. and to some extent Williams) the period of High Modernism who have looked behind the modernist drive to frame tradition as a set of givens that one contains and marshals for authorization, who have sought to become accountable to what Bruns calls "the otherness of tradition." The Black Mountain Poets, such as Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, Denise Levertov, and Edward Dorn, might be fruitfully characterized as post-collage, in order to highlight the fact that the hold exercised by collage begins to dissolve in their writing. In important ways these writers turn aside from modernity and seek to reinvoke fundamental, disorienting questions that the modernists characteristically escape from by foregrounding "technique."

In his most famous meditation upon the lost secrets of tradition, "The Kingfishers," Olson speaks as an "archaeologist of morning," looking, like Williams, into the secrets of the American earth. Where Williams found comfort in figures like Daniel Boone and Edgar Allan Poe, who seemed to authorize his revisionary grounding scheme, Olson confronts the lost meaning of the Omphalos stone at the Delphic oracle and the dark secrets buried in the sacrificial pit in Ancient Mexico, sites where one meets "traditional" questions in their most baffling or frightening immediacy. In "The Kingfishers," Olson thinks about what tradition withholds and about how the present stands with respect to that withholding. The bird itself, so important as a Christian symbol in Eliot's *Four Quartets* and, reversed, as the allegorical Fisher King in *The Waste Land*, becomes in the opening scene of Olson's poem merely the emblem of a decadent intellectualism: "Fernand, who had talked

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lispingly of Albers and Ankor Vat . . . could not go beyond his thought / 'The pool the kingfishers' feathers were wealth why / did the export stop?" '[11] Olson indicts the intellectual's cultural collage of [Josef] Albers, Ankor Vat, Chichen Itza, and the Christian legends of the kingfisher as a sterile, essentially defensive reaction against the direct knowledge of otherness that tradition demands. Olson, like Pound (who does not escape censure in the poem for his own refusal to confront the other), turns away from cocktail-party banter toward primary research and learns an important fact about the kingfishers—the decomposition at the center of their nurturance:

> It nests at the end of a tunnel bored by itself in a bank. There, six or eight white and translucent eggs are laid, on fishbones not on bare clay, on bones thrown up in pellets by the birds.
>
> On these rejectamenta
> (as they accumulate they form a cup-shaped structure) the young are born.
> And, as they are fed and grow, this nest of excrement and decayed fish becomes
> a dripping fetid mass
> (*CO*, p. 87)

Olson's discovery of the biological dependence of the birds upon decay is joined by an investigation of the feathers Fernand had mentioned, which he traces to Prescott's account of the conquest of Mexico by Cortes: as Olson notes, Cortes "tore the eastern idols down, toppled / the temple walls, which, says the excuser / were black from human gore" (*CO*, p. 91). Williams, too, using Cortes' letters in his chapter "The Destruction of Tenochtitlan," was aware of the feathers (he mourns "a spirit mysterious, constructive, independent, puissant with natural wealth; light, if it may be as feathers; a spirit lost in that soil" [*AG*, p. 32]) but he also, like Olson, senses a lost link with tradition in the Aztec human sacrifices that were used as a justification for the devastation Cortes practiced: "Here it was [in the temples] that the tribe's deep feeling for a reality that stems back into the permanent remote origins had its firm hold. It was the earthward thrust of their logic; blood and earth; the realization of their primal and continuous identity with the ground itself, where everything is fixed in darkness" (*AG*, pp. 33–34). Taking off from Williams' intuition of the earthliness of human sacrifice, Olson links it with cannibalism (as reported by Marco Polo) as instances of the dirt-and-gore-encrusted roots of civilization, in which the cultural meets the biological. Remarking "with

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what violence benevolence is bought," Olsen expresses disgust at this frighteningly destructive aspect of human culture, but he refuses to gloss it over: in the age of Auschwitz (the poem was written in 1949), how could he? The Aztec and Mayan sacrificial practices, like the maddeningly enigmatic "E" on the stone at Delphi, signal the absolute recalcitrance of tradition, which gives us intimations of unbearably profound meanings and challenges us to a lifetime of investigation in search of what it withholds. For both Olson and Williams, the earth is the image of that withholding, which Olson vows to investigate by quoting from a previous "archaeologist," Rimbaud: "si j'ai du goût, ce n'est gueres / que pour la terre et les pierre" (*CO*, p. 92).[12] While sharpening his taste on earth and stones, Olson works a variation on Rimbaud's lines, in order to show how his archaeological investigations will mine the same traditional ground: "if I have any taste / it is only because I have interested myself / in what was slain in the sun" (*CO*, pp. 92–93). And then he ends the poem by stepping into action "I hunt among stones" (*CO*, p. 93).

In the most influential essay on "The Kingfishers," Guy Davenport relates it directly to modernism by calling it an "ideogram": "the poem, like a canto of Pound, is a single ideogram, its components working in synergy."[13] Sherman Paul, following in Davenport's footsteps, takes for granted the ideogrammic quality of the poem, commenting, "Ideogram is collage."[14] And Laszlo Géfin, in *Ideogram: History of a Poetic Method*, devotes a chapter to Olson as a practitioner in the "ideogrammic tradition within modern American poetry."[15] Olson's appropriation of Fenollosa's essay *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* and his inheritance from and rebellion against Ezra Pound are very complex subjects, which in fact give rise to many of the issues in "The Kingfishers." Rather than consider these matters, though, I would like to contend that in "The Kingfishers" and its companion poem "The Praises" Olson begins to break up the Poundian ideogram. Instead of "gathering from the air a live tradition" and binding it into an ideogram, Olson begins to loosen the grasp of appropriation and makes himself responsible to the unanswerable demands lurking within an "earth" of tradition (which he comes to call "an actual earth of value"). To the extent that he, too, is concerned with invoking authorization, Olson does find himself constructing an idiosyncratic tradition (*Call Me Ishmael*, for example, might be an expanded chapter of *In the American Grain*). In addition to this instrumental relationship toward tradition, though, he also begins to hold himself accountable to the otherness of tradition in a way that Eliot seemed reluctant to even imagine. Williams,

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however, did prepare the way for Olson and others back to this chthonic tradition, but Williams, like Eliot, remains within the modernist definition of tradition, in which all there is to work with is what is given. In reading Olson, one has the sense he is trying to wrest forth something that has been hidden a long time, something whose emergence would profoundly disturb the modern world.

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[1] Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), p. vii. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *T*.

[2] "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt, 1975), p. 40. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *TT*.

[3] Charles Olson, *Letters for* Origin: *1950–1956*, ed. Albert Glover (New York: Cape Goliard Press, 1970), p. 8. Rpt. in Charles Olson and Cid Corman, *Complete Correspondence: 1950–1964*, ed. George Evans (Orono, Me.: National Poetry Foundation, 1987), II, 42–43.

[4] Stanley Cavell, "Reply to Gayatri Spivak," in W.J.T. Mitchell, ed., *The Politics of Interpretation* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 201–02. Rpt. Stanley Cavell, *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 59.

[5] Henry Seidel Canby, *Saturday Review of Literature* (Dec. 1925); rpt. Charles Doyle, ed., *William Carlos Williams: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1980), pp. 84–86.

[6] Steven Ross Loevy, "Introduction to William Carlos Williams's *Rome*," *Iowa Review*, 9, No. 3 (1978), 5.

[7] J. Hillis Miller, *Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 328–29.

[8] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper, 1977).

[9] Gerald L. Bruns, "What is Tradition? (A Hermeneutical Reflection)," *New Literary History* (forthcoming).

[10] David Antin, "Some Questions about Modernism," *Occident* NS 8 (Spring 1974), 7–38; see esp. 18–26.

[11] *The Collected Poems of Charles Olson*, ed. George Butterick (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1987), p. 86. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *CO*.

[12] This sense of the earth as withholding seems similar to Heidegger's pitting of earth against world in "The Origin of the Work of Art." See Gerald Bruns's discussion of this essay in Chapter One of his *Heidegger's Estrangements: Language, Truth, and Poetry in the Later Writings* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1989).

[13] Guy Davenport, "Scholia and Conjectures for 'The Kingfishers,'" in

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Davenport, *The Geography of the Imagination* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1981), p. 89.

[14] Sherman Paul, *Olson's Push: Origin, Black Mountain, and Recent American Poetry* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1978), p. 17.

[15] Laszlo Géfin, *Ideogram: History of a Poetic Method* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1982), p. ix.

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Engendering History: The Sexual Structure of William Carlos Williams' *In the American Grain*

Bryce Conrad

When D. H. Lawrence described *In the American Grain* as "a glimpse of what the vast America *wants men to be*," he was right in more than one way.[1] Williams' vision of American history almost exclusively features the relation of men to the New World. From Eric the Red to Abraham Lincoln, Williams overwhelmingly populates the American past with male figures, naming men rather than women as the subjects of his various chapters. There is essentially only one woman in the book: the landscape itself, She, the female essence of the New World. "One is forced upon the conception of the New World as a woman," Williams writes in his chapter on Poe (*AG*, p. 222). But it is Williams who presses that conception upon his book, patterning the structure of history after the image which had provided him with the cover illustration for *Kora in Hell*: multiple spermatozoa surrounding a single ovum. Many men, but only one woman, like a continent. They gather upon her shores, and at times, like De Soto, plunge into her body, achieving the objective which Williams had pursued in *Contact*, and which kindled his writing of *In the American Grain*: the "implantation of the sperm."[2]

Such ritualized inseminations of the land are Williams' metaphor for the germination of a distinctively American culture, a life that grows from the unique conditions of the American environment. The aboriginal life of the New World, Williams endeavors to show in "The Destruction of Tenochtitlan," sprang from just such a ceremonial fertilization of the female earth: the city's flowering was rooted in the sacred rites of the Aztec temples, where the priests shed the blood of

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human sacrifices upon idols composed of "seeds and leguminous plants" (p. 34). But *In the American Grain* is primarily concerned with the possibility of creating an indigenous American culture out of the newcomers from Europe. The "peculiar condition of destiny" that marks American history for Williams is "the implantation of an already partly cultured race on a wild continent" (p. 213). The European newcomer had another ground to look back to across the Atlantic, and it was that "home" he often tried to reproduce in the New World, without adapting to the unique conditions of place.[3] Yet Williams conducts American history as a search for those men who broke through that conceptual barrier and seeded themselves in the ground, symbolically fertilizing the native female element like De Soto—or literally fertilizing it like Morton in his pagan revels with Indian maidens at Merry Mount.

Williams' conception of the New World as a woman is, of course, hardly unique. As Annette Kolodny has shown in *The Lay of the Land*, it is perhaps the oldest and most pervasive metaphor in American writing.[4] What distinguishes *In the American Grain* is the way it apprehensively uses the metaphor to envision the American past according to imperatives of gender rather than of genre. Though the early chapters of the book seem to be structured in terms of a conceptual opposition among the main cultural groups from Europe that sought to establish themselves in the New World, the book's underlying structure is based upon a sexual opposition between an invading male principle and a native female principle—the same opposition by which Williams would describe his own genesis as a poet, claiming that his allegiance to the "supplying female" of America had fertilized him as a writer and thus saved him from the "literary sterility" of Europe's "father to father" tradition of artistic genealogy.[5]

Fertilized *him*. Williams sees the inseminating act of culture in terms of the "implantation of the sperm," but he does not envision the New World as a passive woman upon whose body the male inscribes his narrative. She resists inscription within history—history, that is, as represented by the rigidly fixed literary forms that Williams associates with the patriarchal sterility of Europe's ruling literary canons. Indeed, it is her power to rupture those forms that makes her a *supplying* female, the one who fertilizes the male writer. That is the founding mythos of *In the American Grain*—the birth of a poet out of a fecundating contact with the female body of America. In Williams' scheme of history, Columbus stands as the prototype of the American poet. The language of his quotidian journal entries during the Atlantic crossing bursts into

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sudden flower as Columbus describes his first contact with the New World. Columbus marvels over the rich plentitude of the land, seeing diversity manifest in even the smallest shapes of twigs. His description of the beach at San Salvador becomes, for Williams, the first American poem, expressing Williams' own poetic belief in the wonder of the immediate and the particular.

But Columbus is also America's "first victim" (p. 10). Williams portrays Columbus' discovery as a violation of the New World's "immaculate fulfillment" (p. 7), a symbolic rape for which Columbus is punished. "The Discovery of the Indies" is structured so that the tribulations and cataclysmic storms besetting Columbus' subsequent voyages are made to appear as the New World's retribution against Columbus for having "ravished" the flower (p. 7). Williams creates the New World as a woman who can castrate the determining power of an invading Old World patriarchy. Ponce de Leon is cut down by an arrow in his thigh. De Soto, too, is critically wounded in the thigh. In his account of the fighting between the Spaniards and the Indians at Mabilla, Williams invents the detail of an arrow piercing De Soto's "thigh between the edges of the armor"—an arrow sent by She, which "has upon its barbs a kiss from my lips" (p. 49). To become sperm, De Soto must lose his conquering phallus. "Come, black-beard, tireless rider, with an arrow in the thigh" (p. 54), She tells him. She opens herself to him only because the means by which he would extend his authority has been severed. To perform the inseminating acts for an American culture, Europe must be symbolically castrated of its power to inscribe a narrative upon the ground. She will marry, Williams suggests, but she will not be raped.

Williams privileges those men who resign male will and marry the ground, giving themselves fully to place. Like De Soto, they are symbolically consumed, sexually incorporated into the New World. Living in isolation among the Abnaki Indians in Maine, the French Jesuit Sebastian Rasles is "swallowed, a hard yeast" (p. 121). Boone, too, is swallowed, going solitary into the unexplored wilds of Kentucky for three months "to enjoy ecstasy through his single devotion to the wilderness with which he was surrounded." Boone penetrates inland—not to conquer, but to be taken: "The beauty of a lavish, primitive embrace in savage, wild beast and forest rising above the cramped life about him possessed him wholly. Passionate and thoroughly given he avoided the half logic of stealing from the immense profusion" (p. 136). Boone is "thoroughly given"—he possesses the New World by yielding

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himself to be completely "possessed" by it in "a lavish, primitive embrace."

"There must be a new wedding," says Williams, and he points to Boone as the emblem of marriage between man and the New World (pp. 137–38). But "The Discovery of Kentucky" is more marked by Boone's divorce and displacement from the land than his marriage and rootedness to it. Williams, in fact, structures Boone's life as a series of removals. From the "comparatively wild" western Pennsylvania of his boyhood (p. 131), to "the wild Yadkin" in North Carolina, to the completely "unexplored" wilderness of Kentucky, Boone repeatedly moves westward to escape an ever-encroaching tide of settlement. Yet in Kentucky he is literally forced off the land—"by chicanery of the law and in his old age," Boone has "every last acre of the then prosperous homestead he had at last won for himself after years of battle in the new country" stripped from him. He is left "homeless and ruined," wandering "through Tennessee for 'more elbowroom,'" finally heading "for Spanish territory beyond the Mississippi . . ." (p. 139).

The nature of *In the American Grain* shifts with "The Discovery of Kentucky." It becomes more difficult to make raw contact with the New World. And what had been witnessed as a restless spread of settlement to the west during Boone's life becomes, by Sam Houston's time, a progressive laying of civilization upon the land. The New World is not just superficially covered with a thin overlay of settlements—it is buried beneath the accreted strata of a nonindigenous culture. No longer can one simply turn inland. He must descend, like Houston. And even that is not enough. Houston is hardly an affirmation for Williams. Rather than growing into prominence by virtue of his early descent among the Cherokees, Houston seems branded for misfortune. When he resigns as Governor of Tennessee and returns once again to the Cherokees, Williams calls it "the saving gesture," but at the same time "a gesture of despair." What "Descent" really concerns is the increasing impossibility of a reascent in America, the difficulty of any growth from the ground to succeed in breaking through a continually thickening surface of borrowed cultural values. Houston himself seems to vanish beneath that surface as Williams spends most of the chapter lamenting an America "aesthetically satisfied by temporary fillgaps," ending "Descent" with one of his most despairing statements in the book: "However hopeless it may seem, we have no other choice: we must go back to the beginning; it must all be done over; everything that is must be destroyed" (p. 215).

In "Edgar Allan Poe," Williams attempts to reveal a man capable of overturning the despair of "Descent," of fulfilling the chapter's closing

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imperative. Poe takes us "back to the beginning" by destroying "everything that is," dismantling all the cultural falsework erected upon the body of America, clearing the ground of all its layered European "aesthetic adhesions," rooting himself as firmly in the continent as "a new De Soto" (p. 220). The genius of the New World, Williams had warned, "is shy and wild and frail, the loveliest, to be cherished only by the most keen, courageous and sensitive. It may die" (p. 214). But Poe releases the full savagery of the ground, an elemental chthonic power that cannot be subdued: "He was the first to realize that the hard, sardonic, truculent mass of the New World, hot, angry—was, in fact, not a thing to paint over, to smear, to destroy—for it WOULD not be destroyed, it was too powerful,—it smiled!" (p. 225). Williams quotes aptly and generously from Poe's numerous critical pieces, and the statements are strong. They do indeed speak what Williams claims for them: "a movement, first and last to clear the GROUND" (p. 216). Yet Williams focuses on Poe's criticism only because the poetry—the very form which should most surely attest to the strength of Poe's rootedness in the soil—most plainly reveals Poe's defeat.

Poe "is known as a poet," Williams states near the end of the chapter, "yet there are but five poems, possibly three" (p. 232). And other than merely mentioning that "To One in Paradise" is Poe's "best poem" (p. 233), Williams doesn't even bother to specify which poems he has in mind, let alone to quote from any. It is the poetry, nonetheless, that delivers the final word on Poe's role in *In the American Grain*, for it identifies Poe as the victim of an America whose sustaining sources of freshness have all gone dry. Though Williams claims it was the "truculent mass of the New World, hot, angry," that fed Poe's critical statements, the only thing to feed his poetry was his wife. Hardly a supplying female endowed with regenerative powers, she is but an ethereal ideal devoid of earthly passion. Poe could not break through to reach the naked body of the New World despite his attempts to clear the ground. So he imagined a world elsewhere—a woman elsewhere, that is—his own forever virginal Virginia. Not of this earth, she was "one in paradise" even before she died. Yet "When she died," says Williams, "there was nothing left. In his despair he had nowhere to turn" (p. 232). Poe finally emerges not as "a new De Soto," but as one who shows the impossibility of becoming a new De Soto. Poe's poetry ultimately speaks "a fury of impotence," the sound of his voice the tortured cries of a man "driven to be heard by the battering racket about him to a distant screaming . . ." (p. 233). In the end, it is Poe's

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defeat, not his success, that expresses the condition of his immediate world, a New World beaten down and destroyed.

In the American Grain fails to produce its implicit object—an American poet. Yet it is a purposeful rather than an unintentional failure. Though Williams attempts to cultivate the ground of an indigenous American tradition, his book ultimately depicts American history as the destruction of the native female element necessary to that tradition. In the first half of *In the American Grain*, the New World is a woman who aggressively strives to possess the newcomers from Europe. The Puritans have to struggle to fence out the untamed wilderness, to resist the transformative power of the land, stringing a line of defense with their taut rhetoric: "The jargon of God, which they used, was their dialect by which they kept themselves surrounded as with a palisade" (p. 64). The New World repeatedly manifests itself, as Williams says at the end of the Champlain chapter, as "a force to leap up and wrench you from your hold and force you to be part of it; the place, the absolute new without law but the basic blood where the savage becomes brother. That is generous. Open. A break through." That force had indeed leapt up and seized Columbus, De Soto, and Ponce. And even though Champlain "couldn't" make that breakthrough—"He with his maps, for France, for science, for civilization—his gentleness, his swoons"—he wasn't insulated from the violent shock of that power. Champlain's own men rebelled against him striking "at him as an impertinence," says Williams, for "The place (that more vulgar men sensed as the strength in their arms) was outraged . . ." (p. 74).

But in the second half of *In the American Grain*, the New World changes from a naked body potent with regenerative violence to a progressively "stuccoed" continent, languishing beneath layers of borrowed culture. Envisionings of American history as the destruction of a female landscape are, of course, endemic in early twentieth-century American writing. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, published the same year as Williams' book, offers the period's most well-known example of that vision: the "fresh, green breast of the new world" transformed into "a valley of ashes." Williams' history, however, doesn't engage this vision in the terms which most frequently typify the work of his contemporaries—the loss of nineteenth-century pastoral ideals, or images of the machine in the garden. What accounts for the waning power of the ground in the latter chapters of *In the American Grain* is not so much the conquest of America's physical landscape, but the settlement of America's human landscape, the determining of a single, monolithic character for the inhabitants of the continent.

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Such a settlement wasn't possible as long as heterogeneous European cultural groups were vying with each other for territorial possession of the New World. Frenchmen to the north and west, Englishmen along the seaboard, Spaniards to the south, and Indians everywhere—the human landscape was too much in flux, the cultural groups too diverse for any one to assert authorship of the American character. Williams celebrates this diversity in the early chapters of his book, organizing them much like a debate between contending cultural conceptions of what shape life in the New World should take.[6] But in the second half of *In the American Grain* the human landscape becomes decidedly uniform. Debate gives way to consensus after the French, the Spanish, and the English vanish from the book. And cultural diversity gives way to cultural homogeneity as America becomes the sole possession of one group, perhaps the only real group in the book, the Puritans:

> By their very emptiness they were the fiercest element in the battle to establish European life on the New World. The first to come as a group, of a desire sprung within themselves, they were the first American democracy—and it was they, in the end, who would succeed in making everything like themselves. (p. 63)

The Puritans do indeed "succeed in making everything like themselves" in *In the American Grain*. Of all the cultural elements in the book, the Puritans are the one which never gets swallowed up by the land and the Indians. They remain on top, in a position of mastery, thriving not just by the very force of their resistance to the ground but by their unified and dogmatic opposition to any conceptualization of America other than their own. Separatists in more than just a religious sense, the Puritans rigorously enforce a separation from sexual instincts upon the character of the New World's human landscape. When Thomas Morton comes to perform his Priapic ceremonies on the borders of their colony in "The May-Pole at Merry Mount," the Puritans arrest him and ship him back to England. The "official" charge against Morton was "selling liquor and firearms to the savages." But the real reason why the Puritans "chose finally to attack him," according to Williams, "was the moral one of his consorting with the Indian girls" (p. 76). Morton dared to plant his seed in the soil. *That* the Puritans couldn't tolerate. They had to uproot him, to separate his dangerous sexual vigors from the character of their community.

Yet the Puritans' fierce determination to regulate America's human landscape inevitably leads to their domination of the physical landscape. Williams cites the "duplicity" of their military assault on Merry Mount,

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pointing out that the Puritans also had "the trade in beaver skins in view" (p. 80). Just as they usurp Morton's lands under pretense of morality, the Puritans later kill Rasles at his Abnaki village and push their way farther north into Maine. The Puritans' removal of "immoral" elements from the vicinity of their colony inevitably results in the acquisition of new territories. Indeed, it is the Puritans' moral imperative to make "everything like themselves" that subverts the native energies behind the boldest territorial appropriation in American history—the American Revolution. Rather than a liberation of the native impulse, the Revolution merely sweeps aside the foreign political obstacle to a domestically authored control and homogenization of America. It is "those damned Yankees" who strip from Boone the Kentucky lands he had acquired just prior to the Revolution. And Boone heads for Spanish territory not just to find spaces still yet unsettled, but "to leave the young nation which he had helped to establish, definitely behind him" (p. 139).

Williams doesn't explicitly present the Revolution as the stepping-stone to a Puritan takeover. As an identifiable group, the Puritans cease to exist after the Rasles chapter. And as a historical event, in the conventional sense, the Revolution is not even visible in *In the American Grain*. But in his chapters on Washington and Franklin, Williams uses the character of the nation's Founding Fathers to reveal the founding of a *national* character. Indeed, Williams pointedly introduces Washington in terms of this symbolic capacity, presenting him as the key to understanding both the Revolution and the emerging nation. Williams' analysis of Washington's character, however, shows us a man "in a great many ways thoroughly disappointing" (p. 143), one in whom native impulses and sexual vigors are repressed rather than released. Yet Washington is no Puritan, nor does Williams try to make him one. There is nothing "hard and little" (p. 63) about him. The important fact about Washington is that he *was* endowed with a "tremendous vitality" and a "dangerous rudeness." He desired women "violently." But Washington is a disappointment for Williams, and not just because Washington held back his native ardors—the real cause for disappointment is what happened to him because he had such powerful desires at all. Despite his efforts to cover his "dangerous rudeness" with "lace and kid gloves" (p. 140), Washington could not subdue his sexual appetite. "Some girl at Princeton, was it? had some joke with him about a slipper at a dance. He was full of it" (p. 142), remarks Williams. So full of "it," in fact, that his society turned on him. That is the key to Washington's

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symbolic role in *In the American Grain*—not that he reflects the Puritan morality in himself, but that he was attacked because he didn't.

Washington reveals the emerging national character by showing what elements are being extirpated from it. He does not symbolize the new man, the American, but a vanishing species, those "great wench lovers" who are "a kind of American swan song, each one" (p. 143). Such men, for Williams, are animated by a deep sexual tie to the ground, and they would provide just the native force to direct the course of the young nation—"terrible leaders they might make if one could release them" (p. 143). Williams uses Washington to make us conscious of the loss of such leaders, "a loss not compensated for by the tawdry stuff bred after them" (p. 143). That "tawdry stuff" swarms over the landscape in the second half of the book, filling America with "a formless 'population'—drifting and feeding" (p. 233), a "crawling mass" (p. 143) that attacks anyone who manifests sexual powers. They tapped Washington's energies just long enough to wrest a nominal freedom from England, and then they turned upon the man: "The minute he had secured their dung heap for them—he had to take their dirt in the face." The American Revolution becomes, paradoxically, a betrayal of the native element in American culture, and our first president symbolizes, dismayingly, "the typical sacrifice to the mob" (p. 143).

Williams directly forces our awareness of the settlement of America's human landscape by following the Washington chapter with the full text of Benjamin Franklin's "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America." Translated into over twenty languages and widely distributed throughout Europe after the Revolution, the document is Franklin's effort to set the conceptual parameters by which prospective Americans would function in the new country. He clearly delineates the kinds of persons "proper" and "improper" for America and explicitly lays out an orderly scheme by which one may become a "useful" citizen. Yet Franklin's efforts to standardize the character of America's human landscape were only secondarily directed at prospective immigrants. Under the guise of "Poor Richard"—Williams' title for the chapter—Franklin devised the axioms to regulate the attitudes and opinions of the domestic mass. "Poor Richard's Almanac," says Williams, "was as important in founding the nation as Paine's *Age of Reason*," and he pronounces Franklin "the balancer full of motion without direction, the gyroscope which by its large spinning kept us, at that early period of our fate, upon an even keel" (pp. 154, 153).

Franklin's ceaseless industry, his technical innovations, his constant striving for efficiency—the marks by which we commonly know the

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man—all become evidence of a nervous vigilance against the wild power of native things. "He was the dike keeper, keeping out the wilderness with his wits," says Williams. "Fear drove his curiosity" (p. 155). Franklin's desire to touch, to release the play of sexual instincts, might have made him, like Washington, another "sacrifice to the mob," for he, too, seemed made of the stuff of America's "great wench lovers." "But shh!" Williams cautions. "Benjamin Franklin, who started black with an illegitimate son, was forced to turn white, Poor Richard, to save himself later. He saw the hell and warned us, warned us to save our pennies" (p. 179). Franklin's life represents a decisive misdirectioning at a critical moment in our history, a crippling misplacement of the native sexual energies Williams sees as necessary to American cultural vitality.

The only man who saw the true potential of the American Revolution was Aaron Burr. In "The Virtue of History," Williams endeavors to show us a Burr who tried to bring to the new government a political vision beyond the merely political, one founded on creating new men for a New World: "Burr knew what a democracy must liberate. . . . Men intact—with all their senses waking" (p. 206). Yet that liberation is just what the American Revolution failed to accomplish, according to Williams, for the Revolution merely removed the foreign impediment—England—to the transformation of America into the image of "a Protestant heaven" where "Everything is Federalized and all laws become prohibitive in essence" (p. 128), a place where cultural homogeneity is enforced by a central authority, where native diversity on a local level is subordinated to the control of a Federal government. Burr saw that danger, Williams claims, and he recognized the man in whom it was concentrated: Alexander Hamilton, author of the Federal system, the man perhaps most pertinent to our present-day form of government, the face on our ten-dollar bill.

Burr's privileged place in *In the American Grain* arises not because Burr actually embodied the native spirit of liberty that Williams says he did, but because Burr happened to perform a great symbolic act in Williams' vision of American history: he shot Hamilton. Beyond his vociferous enmity toward a strong Federal government, Williams bears an especial malice toward Hamilton for befouling the New World's body with his plan for setting up a national manufactory in the Passaic River valley, Williams' own backyard, "today . . . the vilest swillhole in christendom" (p. 195). Hamilton raped and pillaged the very place that would become the site of Williams' own attempts to marry the ground. Burr had killed Hamilton. And Williams reaches out to Burr as the passionate defender not just of liberty, but of the New World as a

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woman—indeed, of womanhood in the New World. Other than mentioning the duel with Hamilton, Williams makes no effort to discuss the specifics of Burr's political positions and deeds, concentrating instead on his relationship to the female sex—and Burr certainly does qualify, much more than Washington, as one of America's "great wench lovers."

Burr's sexual profligacy—the point upon which nearly all his detractors dwelt—becomes plentiful proof for Williams of Burr's native powers. Burr had openly dared to touch the forbidden female body, and for that he was attacked, just as the Puritans had attacked Morton. Yet women loved Burr, asserts Williams. Burr enabled women to express their native sexuality in a society which had officially prohibited it. He was a "liberating force—for them," and "they drank of him like water" (p. 205). Burr produced an awakening of the female element, an element which in the flesh, just as in the soil, was denied cultivation in the making of modern America. Violated and destroyed, never lovingly touched—the fate of both the land and womanhood in *In the American Grain*. Both are harnessed to "practical" purposes—the land to Hamilton's manufactory, women to domestic slavery as "helpmates at the best, and at the worst, horses, cattle, provincial accessories, useful workers to make coffee and doughnuts . . ." (p. 205). Williams' Burr boldly opposes himself to *that* American grain, fighting the revolution on the sexual front more than anywhere else, waging a battle to revitalize the female principle in America, to cultivate its essential qualities through the flesh and to find "the spirit living there, free and equal, independent, springing with life" (p. 205).

Burr's role as liberator of the female principle is certainly one of Williams' most audacious bits of playacting in the book. Burr, says Williams, is "in myself and so I dig through lies to resurrect him" (p. 197). And Burr would indeed seem to be born out of Williams himself, for Williams peremptorily dismisses any basis for the man in the facts of the historical record: "No opinion can be trusted; even the facts may be nothing but a printer's error . . ." (p. 190). Yet Burr, if we are to believe Williams' later disclosures about his genesis, actually springs less from Williams himself than from his wife, who played the role of the "supplying female" for "The Virtue of History," fertilizing the poet who wrote the chapter. In 1939, Williams told Horace Gregory that "Mrs. Williams helped me a lot with my reading" for *In the American Grain*, indeed that "she did all the reading for the Aaron Burr chapter and it was, besides, her enthusiasm which fired it and which I took over complete, my part being merely to decide on the form of the make-up

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and go ahead" (*SL*, pp. 186–87). And some years later, Williams gave his wife an even more seminal part in Burr's creation, telling Edith Heal that Floss was "solely responsible for Aaron Burr; she told me what she had read, told it so graphically and vividly I sat down and wrote the whole thing in one sitting," adding that "I should confess right here that I never read a single book on him!" (*IWWP*, p. 43).

To what extent these disclosures are mere posturing, and to what extent they contain a quantum of truth is difficult to say. Certain it is, however, that Burr's character shows too many marks of the sexual imperatives of Williams' own poetics for us to accept the chapter as "solely" Floss's responsibility—or for us to regard the disclosures about her involvement in the chapter, as one critic has done, as Williams' "attempt to disown the work."[7] It may well be that Williams' comments to Gregory and Heal on the Burr chapter suggest the extent to which Williams came to associate "The Virtue of History" not just with his appropriation of Floss's "enthusiasm," which he "took over complete," but with his larger appropriation of the female role in the book as a whole. The apparent contradiction between Williams' claim that Burr is "in myself" and that Burr is wholly got out of Floss perhaps points to Williams' arrogation of the very thing Burr is ostensibly intended to release in *In the American Grain*, the fertilizing power of the female—a supposition that is reinforced by the symbolic genealogy Williams creates for Burr in the text.

Our first glimpse of Burr in the book comes at the end of "Jacataqua," the chapter which immediately precedes "The Virtue of History," as he marches through the forests of Maine to join Arnold's army for the attack on the British at Quebec in 1776. Standing in the woods and watching the assembling troops is a group of "twenty or more Abenaki braves," remnants of Rasles' beloved tribe, presided over by their "Sachem, Jacataqua, a girl scarce eighteen, in whom showed the best traits of her mixed French and Indian blood" (p. 186). The symbolic offspring of Rasles' marriage with the ground, Jacataqua becomes Burr's "supplying female," the woman who fertilizes him for his role as liberator of the female principle. Their attraction to each other is immediate and sexual—"her black eyes met a pair as dark and flashing as her own, met and were held." Burr approaches, but it is Jacataqua who speaks the archetypal power of the female:

> In a moment, Burr was standing before the Indian princess, for the first and last time at a loss before a woman. Primitive and direct, it was she who opened the conversation and opened it with a challenge:

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> "These," with a wave of her brown hand toward Howard and the group of officers, "these want meat. You hunt with me? I win." (p. 187)

"Primitive and direct," Jacataqua embodies the potent sexuality of the New World as a woman every bit as much as the She of "De Soto and the New World." Like She, Jacataqua is a huntress—a huntress of men. Just as She had conquered De Soto, Jacataqua conquers Burr, who stands "for the first and last time at a loss before a woman." Presiding over her "twenty or more Abenaki braves," Jacataqua represents the native matriarchal essence of the New World, the primacy of the female. And like She, in fact, Jacataqua is entirely Williams' own invention. Both women are conjured out of Williams himself—except that in this case, Williams disguises Jacataqua's origins in his imagination by giving her an apparent origin in fact. Unlike She, Jacataqua is historically plausible in both name and details.[8] Williams supplies his own supplying female for the scheme of the Burr chapter as surely as he had done so for the De Soto chapter, yet with Jacataqua he slyly conceals the fabrication in order to mask an essential point of his sexual poetics in the book: Williams demands of the female a role that can only be fulfilled by the products of his own imagination rather than actual women of historical record. His ostensibly matriarchal structure for *In the American Grain* is actually a pseudo-matriarchy. Though Williams declares the primacy of the female, his reigning women are all got out of Williams himself, a repetition of the founding myth of patriarchy—Eve got out of Adam's rib.

"Jacataqua" is the only chapter of *In the American Grain* to name a woman as its subject; yet significantly, Jacataqua herself is noticeably absent for most of the chapter, appearing only briefly in the closing paragraphs. Jacataqua becomes that which is missing in "Jacataqua"—and quite literally so, for Williams introduces her at the end of the chapter in terms of her filling an absence, of giving "to womanhood in her time, the form which bitterness of pioneer character had denied it" (p. 186). She is invented to fill an absence that is the actual subject of "Jacataqua"—the absence of a female flowering in America. Williams explicitly proclaims that "there have never been women" of significance in American history, that there has never been a woman of sufficient clarity or genius to serve his historical scheme—"Never a character to raise into story" (pp. 178, 186). Even though Williams castigates historians in "The Virtue of History" for portraying the individual life "in generic patterns, like effigies or the carvings on sarcophagi" (p. 188), he portrays American women as generic types in "Jacataqua,"

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calling them nothing but "pioneer Katies" and "good, firm Janes" (pp. 178, 179). Yet Williams, of course, doesn't present this twisting of American women into generic shapes as his own work—he attributes it to history itself, to "the great American tide inimical to women" (p. 184).

Williams creates a grim picture of a sexually crippled America, a ghastly landscape of desperate people "bursting for lack of sexual satisfaction" (p. 182). Sexual energies are sublimated in a frenzy for money-making, a manic excitement over natural disaster and catastrophe, a thrilling to the crude violence of football. "Our life drives us apart and forces us upon science and invention—away from touch" (p. 179), says Williams, and he points to mechanisms of sublimation which clearly evidence the legacy of Franklin's science of avoidance and the Puritans' fear of an infiltrating Other: "The impact of the bare soul upon the very twist of the fact which is our world about us, is un-American. *That* we shun and rush off to the laboratory, the wheatfield (hiding our indecent passion in meddling, playing) . . ." (p. 178). Our passions are reduced "to the straining of a telescope" (p. 175) in a world where desire is invoked only in the realm of the gaze, where "a kind of celluloid of gayety (I am speaking of the theaters), a numbing coat . . . cuts us off from touch" (p. 180). And the female body—for Williams, the ultimate object of desire—becomes a mere visual image, a two-dimensional body without organs, "fit only to be seen in shows, or, in the train of a launch, on aquaplanes, six at a time, the swift motion only serving to give the authentic sense of slipperiness, pseudo-naiads without the necessary wildness and the chill—fit only to be seen by the box, like Oregon apples, bright and round but tasteless—wineless, wholesale" (pp. 183–84).

Williams, like his Burr, would restore "the necessary wildness" to American women—and the wildness necessary to his own poetics, the power of the "supplying female." Without that fertile source, there can be no poet. And Williams, in fact, presents the matter in just such rigidly axiomatic terms, stating "Never a woman: never a poet. That's an axiom. Never a poet saw sun here" (p. 179). Yet just as Williams' failure to deliver a poet within the scheme of *In the American Grain* is a purposeful failure, so is his failure to find "a true woman in flower" (p. 179). It becomes necessary for Williams to deny the presence of that which is necessary, according to his poetics, for American poetry. And rather than deducing the failure of American art from the failure of a female flowering in America, Williams actually induces his premise by

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examining its supposed effects, offering the emptiness of American art as proof of the emptiness of American women:

> Women—givers (but they have been, as reservoirs, empty) perhaps they are being filled now. Hard to deal with in business, more conservative, closer to the earth—the only earth. They are our cattle, cattle of the spirit—not yet come in. None yet has raised benevolence to distinction. Not one to "wield her beauty as a scepter." It is a brilliant opportunity.—But the aesthetic shown by American artists (the test of the women) is discouraging: the New England eunuchs,—"no more sex than a tapeworm"—faint echoes of England, perhaps of France, of Rousseau, as Valéry Larbaud insists,—Ryder: no detail in his foregrounds just remote lusts, fiery but "gone,"—Poe: moonlight. It is the annunciation of the spiritual barrenness of the American woman. (p. 181)

Williams positions the male artist as the measure of woman. His "aesthetic" is her "test," the sounding of her depth. But American artists have had nothing to measure but a spent quality, "reservoirs" gone dry. Williams, however, seems to betray his own argument for "the spiritual barrenness of the American woman" with the less than convincing nature of his evidence. Exactly who "the New England eunuchs" are he doesn't make clear—nor is it clear how Larbaud's alleged comment on Rousseau applies to these "eunuchs" with "'no more sex than a tapeworm.'" Furthermore, Williams' judgment on Albert Ryder's paintings—"no detail in his foregrounds just remote lusts"—seems to be cribbed from Rosenfeld's chapter on Ryder in *Port of New York* (1924).[9] And the testimony of Poe's poetry is dispensed with in a word—"moonlight." But what of the testimony of Williams' own art, of the very book in which he passes these judgments? No real women, just imaginary females. "Of course, our history has been short and comparatively obscure, for the most part," Williams confesses. "There must be character in out of the way places, naturally, but none has raised the point of which I speak, to distinction" (p. 185). None—including Williams himself. He has found it more expedient to supply his own "supplying females" than to search for women of historical record who might reveal something other than the "barrenness" of the American female.[10]

Which is not to say there are absolutely no actual women in *In the American Grain*. There are—but Williams makes no attempt to explore their characters. They function only as symbolic devices, like Bridget Bishop and Susanna Martin in "Cotton Mather's Wonders of the Invisible World," who are but mere signifiers of female victimization by the tide of American culture. So, too, Emily Dickinson. Williams says

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she is "about the only woman one can respect for her clarity" (p. 180), pronouncing her "the very nearest we have ever been" to producing "a true woman in flower." But Williams looks no deeper into Dickinson's life or poetry other than to point to her "starving of passion in her father's garden" as evidence of woman's fate in America (p. 179). Even though Williams declares Dickinson to possess qualities he would want to investigate, he uses her simply as an emblem of the difficulty of living "against the stream" (p. 180)—and one wonders whether Williams could, within his sense of the male artist as the measure of a woman, and within his conception of the New World as the necessary bride of an American poet, give serious consideration to Dickinson, a woman, as a poet.[11]

But not all the women in *In the American Grain* are symbols of victimization. They are just as often objects of idealization. Williams praises Burr for having envisioned women as "deliciously a free thing, apart, *feminine*, a heaven," a vision that Williams locates in Burr's obsessive devotion to his daughter Theodosia as an idealized image of femininity. Burr, says Williams, "had created her into his free world where he lived in unconstraint. She was as far above the women of her time as he would have had himself above the men" (p. 203). Williams gives similar treatment to Raleigh's Platonic idealization of Elizabeth. She, too, becomes a woman "apart, *feminine*, a heaven" through Williams' depiction of Raleigh's sweeping imaginative search of the New World as "a voyage on the body of his Queen: England, Elizabeth—Virginia!" (p. 60). Burr's Theodosia and Raleigh's Elizabeth, like Poe's Virginia, might well reflect Williams' own fascination with an idealized feminine form. "The one earthly island he found where he might live in something akin to the state he imagined," Williams says of Poe, "the love of his wife, had to be single and inviolate" (p. 231). But Williams also makes clear Virginia's inadequacy for Poe, pointing to the cold sterility of the poetry she inspired. Like "the white daisy" at the end of *Spring and All*, Virginia "is / not enough." She lacks the "rich orange / round the purple core," the fertile hues of the "Black eyed Susan" that is "rich / in savagery." Williams' own idealized feminine forms are anything but "inviolate" virginal women—they are almost always images of a more sensuous flowering, images of the "Arab / Indian / dark woman" (*I*, p. 151).

The "white" wife supplanted by the "dark" bride—Williams twists the conventional nineteenth-century topos of "light" and "dark" ladies for his own purposes in *In the American Grain*.[12] De Soto's Doña Ysobel is symbolically exchanged for Macanoche and Mochila, the daughters of

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the chief of Pacaha (p. 53). Houston's Eliza Allen is replaced by a Cherokee wife (pp. 212–13). Williams insistently equates dark women with the regenerative darkness of the female earth. In "Advent of the Slaves," Williams points to this quality in both "colored men and women whom I have known intimately" (p. 208). Yet Williams doesn't attempt to lift these women into story as he would later do in "The Colored Girls of Passenack—Old and New"—he merely gestures to them as symbols of fertile womanhood.[13] Williams, in fact, uses a fictional character as his primary symbol of the black woman's primal powers, citing the "thrilling pleasure and deep satisfaction" he derived from "E.K. Means' tale, *Diada Daughter of Discord*, an outstanding story of a wild nigger wench, billeted upon a friend's family by her owner while he went for a short boat trip without her," admonishing us, "Read *Diada*—cutting cane stalks, sharpening them with lightning speed and driving them through the attacking hounds" (p. 210).[14] The fictional Diada points to the essential fictiveness of the "real" women Williams valorizes in his book—they are all symbolic "daughters of discord," avatars of the sensuous and truculent She, Williams' own idealized generic feminine form.

The only "real" woman in the book who gains a life beyond the merely symbolic demands of Williams' poetics is Freydis in "Red Eric." Williams encountered two different versions of Freydis' story in the Vinland sections of the Icelandic sagas he read for the Red Eric chapter. "The Saga of Eric the Red" identifies Freydis as "Eric's natural daughter," telling how she single-handedly drove off a band of attacking "Skrellings" (Eskimos) after her own men had fled in fear. Pregnant, unable to keep up with the retreat, Freydis seized the sword of a slain comrade and turning to face her pursuers, "stripped down her shift, and slapped her breast with the naked sword," at which the Skrellings fled in terror.[15] "The Vinland History of the Flat Island Book" gives Freydis a more darkly prominent role. She cruelly conspires against Helgi and Finnbogi, the two brothers who accompany her and her husband, Thorvard, in a second ship to the coast of Vinland. Freydis contrives a grievance by which she forces her husband and his men to murder not only the brothers but their entire crew as well. The only ones spared in this bloodbath are the women, "and these no man would kill," states the saga. "At this Freydis exclaimed: 'Hand me an axe!' This was done, and she fell upon the five women, and left them dead."[16]

Williams was obviously captivated by the details of both versions, for he joins them together in a single composite version, making Freydis the central figure of the latter sections of "Red Eric." Otherwise, he

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alters his source material very little, narrating Freydis' exploits almost verbatim from the sagas themselves. Yet Williams didn't need to mythologize Freydis for his chapter, for the sagas—products of an oral folk tradition—had already performed that task. Freydis, whose name derives from Freya, the Norse goddess of love and fertility, is archetypically portrayed as a savagely violent matriarch, a woman who ruthlessly enforces her power through terror and bloodshed. What is remarkable about Williams' handling of that already inscribed role is the way he emplots it within *In the American Grain*. Freydis becomes the defender of the New World's matriarchal essence. Her bloody deeds are what drives the tide of history from the shores of America, restoring the New World to that state of "immaculate fulfillment" which continues inviolate until Columbus' symbolic rape.

Freydis reveals what Julia Kristeva terms "abjection," the powers of horror associated with the generative violence of the female body.[17] Williams fully releases those powers but once, within the distant space of a kind of prehistory in the book's opening chapter. They flare again in She, in her symbolic castration of De Soto as he plunges back to primal origins—but Williams seeks to contain that frightening female power rather than to release it in his book. Though it is a power that can fertilize the poet, immersing him in the rich chaos of the unknown, it can also destroy him, consuming him in the primordial darkness of mother night.[18] *In the American Grain* is Williams' symbolic struggle to appropriate that power for his art—a struggle that gains literal verity in his treatment of the Baroness, perhaps the most significant actual woman to appear in the book. "I don't suppose," writes Williams in "Jacataqua," that "there has ever been an American woman like Kiki or that delightful Baroness who paraded Fifth Avenue one day with a coal-scuttle for a chapeau. Naturally they arrested her. Naturally. She would have been arrested in any city, but not, I imagine, with quite such a sense of duty as in America. To permit such a thing would cast a very awkward light on us all" (p. 178).[19]

The Baroness is not an exemplar of "spiritual barrenness," and Williams points to her arrest as emblematic of his culture's fear of the unrestricted female. But Williams doesn't mention the "very awkward light" the Baroness cast on him—nor that he himself had the Baroness arrested and jailed in New York. Williams' own relationship with Else von Freytag-Loringhoven, a German woman of title prominent in the avant-garde circles of Paris and New York, is quite different from what he suggests in "Jacataqua." Williams refers to her as "*that* delightful Baroness," as if she were not of his direct acquaintance, but his own

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encounters with her were intensely intimate and, in the end, intensely violent. Yet his need to distance her as *that* Baroness was no doubt acutely felt, for she continued to haunt his consciousness while he was writing "Jacataqua." He had tried to rid himself of her—indeed, he had even paid to have her sent back to Paris just before he began work on *In the American Grain*. "The Baroness, though," as Williams wryly remarks in his *Autobiography*, "didn't leave me so easily" (*A*, p. 166). But the Baroness was long dead at the time he wrote the *Autobiography*, and he could afford to jest. During the composition of *In the American Grain*, she was still very much alive—threateningly so, to Williams' mind.

Williams was in his mid-thirties when he met her—she some ten years older than he. She was a reckless and flamboyant artist, a female creature, in Williams' view, of wild and exotic plumage living in the rank Dada slums of 1919 New York. He admired her radical spirit, her iconoclastic poems in the *Little Review*, her outré costumes, her sexual abandon and appetite. He had even made the initial gesture of wanting to ravish her—but when the Baroness responded with the full force of her passion, Williams fled in horror. She wanted to regenerate him with her body, to suck him into her vortex much as She does with De Soto. She did, in fact, bite his lips, drawing blood when he kissed her once. And she demanded that he make love to her so that he would contract her venereal disease and thus rid himself of his bourgeois tendencies and become a true artist. She hunted him, and he found her pursuit intolerable. She proved a true "daughter of discord" who could destroy the structure of his world. She invaded his domestic life, physically assaulting him at his home in Rutherford, where he thought he was safe from her, and he bought a punching bag to vent his frustrations. Or was he honing his skills for a counterattack? The next time he encountered her on the street in New York, he "flattened her with a stiff punch to the mouth" (*A*, p. 169). Then he had her arrested for assault.

But the Baroness responded with something even more threatening than physical violence. She turned to art. Under the guise of reviewing his *Kora in Hell*, which had been appearing serially in the *Little Review*, the Baroness accused Williams of "male-bluff" posturing, of trying to hide his bourgeois nature under the cloak of art.[20] She had to be silenced. And Williams turned to the most effective tool he had for finally controlling her—his writing. In his own magazine, *Contact*, Williams published "The Three Letters," a piece that plays on the Baroness' charging him with posturing by plainly exposing the bluffing disguises of his own art. The apparently fictional masks he employs are

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designed to reveal rather than conceal the actual identities of the protagonists. William Carlos Williams is Evan Dionysius Evans, the Baroness simply La Baronne. Far from attempting to conceal the details of his involvement with the Baroness as he does in "Jacataqua," Williams makes them all too visible, leaving the evidence in plain view, much in the style of the Minister D in Poe's "The Purloined Letter."[21]

And there are indeed purloined letters of a sort in "The Three Letters," the very letters announced in the title, the letters which Evans sends to La Baronne and which she threatens to publish when he rejects her passions: "I want you, Evan Dionysius Evans, she had hissed. Well, you can't have me, he said, like that. Then I'll publish the letters, she whispered. Be sure you don't miss any, he rejoined."[22] The weapon with which La Baronne threatens Evans is perhaps the same one which Williams feared the Baroness would use against him in the wake of her piece in the *Little Review*. He evidently realized that the letters were a weapon only if he tried to suppress them. Plainly exposed to view, they would be harmless—and they are, in fact, plainly exposed in the text of "The Three Letters." Evans so cheerfully dismisses the threat of the letters, reminding La Baronne not to miss any, because Williams has already published the contents of each during the course of the narrative.

The three letters:

1. I love you.
2. *Quod licet Jovi non licet bovi.*
3. You damned stinking old woman . . . you dirty old bitch. . . .[23]

Though Williams disperses the letters in his text, gathered together they tell the essential story of his relationship with the Baroness. Evans declares his love for La Baronne, but when she responds in kind, unleashing passions that threaten to overwhelm him, he draws the line. *Quod licet Jovi non licet bovi*—What is lawful for Jove isn't lawful for a cow. The Latin proverb had purportedly been sent by Evans because La Baronne wanted to quote it in an article she was writing. But Williams' message is clear enough—men have privilege over women, like Jove over a cow. As he says in "Jacataqua," women "are our cattle, cattle of the spirit—not yet come in." Yet when they do come in, not docilely, but with a vengeance, Williams recoils in horror. Evans brands La Baronne a "damned stinking old woman," a "dirty old bitch."

But "The Three Letters," one of Williams' last prose pieces before *In the American Grain*, is about much more than Williams and the Baroness—it is also about his conception of the "supplying female" and

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the New World as a woman. Evan Dionysius Evans is a man for whom "America, since his boyhood, had stood . . . as a virginal young woman—inclined, of course, to grant important favors to certain individuals of special distinction." Evans' America, however, doesn't bestow herself upon him as a young virgin. She is an old woman with a "reek" that "stood out purple from her body, separating her forever from the clean muslin souls of Yankeedom." But this woman, though sexually ravished, is nonetheless strangely virginal, "mystically dirty" like her "unspeakably filthy tenement." And for Evans, she is "the fulfillment of a wish. . . . America personified in the filth of its own imagination."[24] The Baroness incarnates the sexual dichotomy that Williams later explicitly fuses in "The whore and the virgin, an identity" in *Paterson* (*P*, p. 210). She is an inexhaustible Eden, an ever-virginal whore, the poet's idealized embodiment of America.

Williams, furthermore, pointedly makes "The Three Letters" the story of his own poetic genesis. "At age thirty-five," Williams says as he introduces La Baronne, "Evan Dionysius Evans met, in the flesh, the Old Woman he had praised" in a "long love poem about the Passaic River and an old woman, which Orick Johns, dear Orick, called great and Ezra Pound printed in his Catholic Anthology. The Wanderer, it can be found also in my book, Al Que Quiere."[25] Williams emerges from behind this thin mask, directing us to the very poem which records his birth as a poet. In "The Wanderer" he had created his archetype of the "supplying female," patterning it upon his own grandmother, Emily Wellcome, the "gypsy" of the family (*IWWP*, p. 26; *A*, p. 166):

> Ominous, old, painted—
> With bright lips and lewd Jew's eyes
> Her might strapped in by a corset
> To give her age youth, perfect
> In her will to be young

She baptizes the poet in the ravished body of America, "the filthy Passaic" (*CP1*, p. 35). The Baroness offered Williams a renewal of his origins, and he indeed verbally enacts it through Evans and La Baronne: "To her kind only could his mind go to be kindled," says Williams, and Evans professes his love for her "just as he had cried out, I love you, in the direction of his own unbelievable grandmother, the wolf of the family."[26]

But the Baroness is not used for a mere mythogenetic repetition of the earlier poem—her story significantly alters the narrative. In "The Wanderer," the poet is fertilized by submitting himself to the woman's power—in "The Three Letters," he is kindled by the struggle to subdue

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it, to control it by exercise of his art. Nor does Williams attempt to conceal that fact in his creation of the Baroness. He imagines Evans' triumph over her in terms of generating her "from his neck" in the same "way the Greek gods would sometimes get themselves created out of each other's thighs or shoulders. Eve, too, from Adam's brisket."[27] Williams ultimately generates himself as poet by generating the women who ostensibly generate him, giving birth to them in the body of his writing, fertilizing himself by the very struggle to contain their potentially destructive powers within the substance of the written word.[28] *In the American Grain* symbolically enacts this ravishment of the New World. Even though Williams presents his writing of American history as the marriage of word and place rather than the rape of place by word, his poetics actually celebrate a ritualized violation of the female, forcing an inscription upon the woman, writing upon the body of the mother.[29]

[1] D. H. Lawrence, "American Heroes," *Nation*, 14 (Apr. 1926); rpt. in *William Carlos Williams: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Charles Doyle (London: Routledge, 1980), p. 90.

[2] William Carlos Williams, "Comment," *Contact*, 4 (Summer 1921), 18.

[3] Williams gives a brilliant example of this process at the opening of "The American Background," his 1934 essay which reexamines much of the historical ground of *In the American Grain* (*SE*, pp. 134–61).

[4] Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1975).

[5] See his "Letter to an Australian Editor," *Briarcliff Quarterly*, 3 (Oct. 1946), 205–08.

[6] Vera M. Kutzinski discusses *In the American Grain* in terms of Williams' inclusion of cultural elements generally marginalized by traditional assessments of the origins of American cultural identity in the opening chapter of her *Against the American Grain: Myth and History in William Carlos Williams, Jay Wright, and Nicolás Guillén* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1987), pp. 1–46.

[7] James E. Breslin, *Williams Carlos Williams: An American Artist* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), p. 118.

[8] The setting for Burr's meeting with Jacataqua is real enough. Burr did indeed join Arnold's troops in Maine for the march to Quebec. And "Jacataqua" is plausible as a French and English corruption from one of several Indian languages of the Northeast, including Algonquian, Huron, and Abnaki. (A similar form occurs in the name of Chautauqua County in New York, of Huron origin.) But as an actual person, Jacataqua, to the best of my knowledge, occurs nowhere but in Williams' chapter. Williams, however, seems to have had both the form of the name and the basis of a connection with Burr roughly in mind as early as *The Great American Novel*. Mentioning, among many other swirling fragments of the American past, Burr's marriage to the elder widow Mrs.

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Prevost, Williams exclaims, "Jataqua!" (*I*, p. 190). There is some possibility that Williams may have received either the Jacataqua legend or the inspiration for it from Wallace Gould, a one-quarter Abnaki Indian from Maine. Gould, who wrote several books of poetry which incorporate material from Indian legends—but none of which mention Jacataqua—stayed at Williams' home in Rutherford for several months in 1921 (*A*, pp. 164–65).

[9] Paul Rosenfeld, *Port of New York*, introd. Sherman Paul (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1966), remarks of Ryder's painting that "Sexual fear in particular speaks from the forms. It was the sexual expression of the mechanism of resistance to the present moment that kept the foregrounds comparatively empty, and gave interest preponderantly to the middle and upper reaches of the canvas" (p. 14).

[10] It is interesting to note that at approximately the same time Williams was writing "Jacataqua," Elizabeth Anthony Dexter published her pioneering study, *Colonial Women of Affairs, a Study of Women in Business and the Professions in America before 1776* (Boston: Houghton, 1924). Dexter certainly manages to find "character in out of the way places" as well as in prominent places, belying Williams' claim.

[11] In "The American Background," Williams praises "the authenticity of Emily Dickinson's unrhymes" (*SE*, p. 155). And in "The Somnambulists," a 1929 review of Kay Boyle's *Short Stories*, Williams identifies "first Emily Dickinson and then Kay Boyle" as the two most noteworthy women writers in America to waken from the narcotic sleep that isolates the individual from a sense of immediacy and contact (*I*, p. 340). Williams was acutely and sympathetically aware of the difficulties faced by women writers "in a world where men are expected to take a leading place"—see his letter to Mary Ellen Solt, *William Carlos Williams Review*, 11 (Fall 1985), 3—and indeed outspokenly supportive of writers like Lola Ridge, Kay Boyle, Djuna Barnes, and Marianne Moore throughout his life. But in *In the American Grain* he seems to exploit the difficult position of women in American society to further his own scheme rather than to attempt to alleviate it.

[12] Note also the prominently symbolic character of Grace Black in *A Voyage to Pagany*, who represents the dark female power of America in a bitterly self-imposed exile. Williams has Evans give her a copy of nothing other than *In the American Grain* at parting: "He gave her for a keepsake a copy of a book he had once published upon some characters from the American History. She was delighted.—Free from the collegiate taste, she wagered, pressing it with real pleasure" (*VP*, p. 214).

[13] In "Advent of the Slaves" Williams merely mentions Georgie Anderson "as some female who walked upon air and light—in her wild girlhood" (*AG*, p. 211). In "The Colored Girls of Passenack—Old and New," he devotes several pages to her (*FD*, pp. 50–53). Interestingly, Anderson, who worked in the Williams household as a maid during Williams' youth, was the first woman, besides his grandmother, Williams ever saw naked, and both women would become almost obsessive images of his desire for the female body. (See also *A*, p. 12.)

[14] Williams' reference is to E. K. Means's "Diada, Daughter of Discord," the first piece in his collection of tales about black life in the South, *More E. K. Means* (1919; rpt. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), pp. 1–69. Williams

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seems to have already had Diada in mind as the prototype of She in *The Great American Novel*, remarking as he imagines De Soto's demise at the Mississippi, "Diada Daughter of Discord: read it" (*I*, p. 192).

[15] "The Saga of Eric the Red," trans. Arthur Middleton Reeves, in *The Northmen, Columbus, and Cabot, 985–1503*, ed. Julius E. Olson and Edward Gaylord Bourne, vol. 1 of *Original Narratives of Early American History*, ed. Frederick Jameson (New York: Scribner's, 1906), pp. 32, 38. This is the same volume from which Williams drew his documentary material for "The Discovery of the Indies."

[16] "The Vinland History of the Flat Island Book," trans. Arthur Middleton Reeves, in Olson and Bourne, pp. 62–64. Williams habitually miscalled this document *The Long Island Book* (*SL*, p. 186, *A*, p. 178).

[17] See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror, an Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1982), particularly "Those Females Who Can Wreck the Infinite," pp. 157–73.

[18] See the "Night" chapter in Williams' *A Voyage to Pagany*. The poet is symbolically thrust back into the "nameless terror" of origins in Genoa, the city of Columbus' nativity, experiencing the primal dead of night, "the mother stuff," out of which all art is generated (*VP*, pp. 90–94).

[19] Kiki was Man Ray's mistress, who came to America in 1924. Williams had previously made another fleeting reference to her in one of his *Spring and All* poems (*I*, p. 113).

[20] Else von Freytag-Loringhoven, "Thee I call 'Hamlet of Wedding-Ring,'" *Little Review*, 7 (Jan.–Mar. 1921), 48. Von Freytag-Loringhoven's piece on Williams was so long that the editors, Jane Heap and Margaret Anderson, who had initially introduced Williams to the Baroness, had to print it in two separate parts, the second not appearing until after "The Three Letters" had already come out. The delay in publication might be said to make the opening line of the second part a nicely anticipatory response to the *Contact* piece: "Put woman into book because cannot put her with good conscience—grace—right touch—anymore into bed!," *Little Review*, 8 (Autumn 1921), 108.

[21] Sandra M. Gilbert uses the paradigm of "The Purloined Letter" to discuss Williams' appropriation of Marcia Nardi's letters in the writing of *Paterson* as indicative of the ways in which Williams shapes and controls women in his work. See "Purloined Letters: William Carlos Williams and 'Cress,'" *William Carlos Williams Review*, 11 (Fall 1985), 5–15.

[22] William Carlos Williams, "The Three Letters," *Contact*, 4 (Summer 1921), 13.

[23] *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 12, 13.

[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 11.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 10. Williams refers to Orrick Johns, a poet who frequented the *Others* group (*A*, p. 135).

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[28] See again the "Night" chapter, in which Williams writes from that fertilizing terror, "Darkness and despair: These are my home. Here I have always retreated when I was beaten, to lie and breed with myself" (*VP*, p. 93).

[29] One is reminded, of course, of Williams' relationship with his own mother, Elena Rose Hoheb Williams, and the ways in which he attempted to

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shape her life in writing. He had spoken of her at length in the "Prologue" to *Kora in Hell*, calling her "an impoverished, ravished Eden but one indestructible as the imagination itself" (*I*, p. 7). And in writing *Yes, Mrs. Williams*, his "Personal Record" of his mother, Williams calls attention to his violation of his mother's request that he not put her in a book: "Don't you write about me, she would say—but I confess that I paid little attention to her" (*Y*, p. 24). Williams' violation of his mother's word gives a sharp irony to the title *Yes, Mrs. Williams*, for the book itself says "No, Mrs. Williams" to her desire to resist historical inscription.

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The Baroness Elsa Freytag von Loringhoven

William Carlos Williams

I am singularly free from envy—perhaps it has all been spent. Jealous I am for moments—but compared to my insane tempers as a child what I now experience is nothing. (I am older than almost anyone I know in these things.)

It has been first with me to find out what life means and though I have got nowhere it does not mean sex—not in my experience. Nor apparently in the case of the Baroness.

To me a friend is an oasis, a garden of pleasure where I am free—I suppose none knows the meaning of "oasis" but an arab. Therefore the force of the experience has come into every language in the world, that intensity of relief—a friend is where one is not forced but free—

that then is why they are not satisfied with me—I have denied them what they would have of me—perhaps. But turn it around. I do not seek anything material of a friend; I do not want more on my part than freedom of understanding—where I may retreat to prepare for the material battle—outside.

In short I do not find myself as juvenile as they imagine. I find myself not this side but that side of wisdom and they perhaps beautifully but at any rate stuck in the middle.

I can see the fun in Blake's female "Fun" or laughter or comedy or

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whatever she is in addition to the pubic V. I find myself out there hard on life, at least when I am not downcast, suicidally intent.

That to me is my gaiety. It is apparently something else to those who are heavy.

All the mechanical fol de rol of politics and organizations generally, the "discoveries" of science, the triumphs of law and of surgery and philosophy seem oddly old fashioned to me in a primitive world of understanding. No one is living anymore but a few (I am speaking of writers they are all writing their experiences they are not living in their writing).

Men I have found insignificant to me, interested in fire engines or—that. Women I have found tremendous, absorbed in the body of their opponent, real.

All this stuff they fight over and write their Sunday editions about and become perfect and wise in is pre-writing. Writing in all its imperfect actuality is more like a man, it must be placed first, it is not perfected by itself.

It is better, I think, to go another way, to write, to be *on* writing—like McAlmon, so little understood—with mistakes (another man) but *on it* always and let the ability come with the fact—or not as happens.

My lightheartedness has become suspect by my friends. It has seemed juvenile very often or at best incomplete. I have suffered bitterly from slights too immaterial to be of visible consequence but curiously important to me. They have come from friends who believed me a liar in deed since I did not carry my "spring" through, that I stopped there. That that is why I live as I do working in an unimportant society (if you will call it such), that I do not go out and face a dangerous and rewarding world. In short that I am too much a writer, not enough a doer. Thus how can I write? Especially when I myself say continually that writing is only, and by this I mean solely, in its excellence, the reflect of life in its newest actual reaches.

All that is done of writing, otherwise, and this is the limit of the popular-informed American conception, is pre-actual. That writing begins only with action, the man himself, which it rides into the unknown of himself, carelessly, fearlessly, uncertain of what will be found. One writes to prepare for this. A few roughly go that far. I suppose they say what they mean. But then comes the matter of form which is finally the synthesis.

It is a hard thing to lose a friend. The Baroness tried to destroy me.

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That made no difference to me because she couldn't, but the form it took was familiar. "Come with me and I will make a man of you." Yea, yea.

The thing it has been late for me to learn is that men are selfish liars—this must of course include myself. I have believed in honesty in order that the problems of life may remain actual. Where a lie enters there is no problem. With an actual face to the difficulty I myself have unsolvable <unsolved> difficulties of existence enough before me to work upon. This I have asked my friends to take for granted. I do not ask the world at large to be interested—as I do not ask quarter for my attempts at form.

Even a taste of reputation is nauseous. One may learn to like [it] I suppose, as one likes *poi* finally if he is a South Sea Islander, but it has never entered into my calculations since I was seventeen.

But my friends I have thought of as always honest, always unselfish, always tolerant and always patient—It seems that I myself have deceived them. I did not want to go the limit as they thought I should. The amazing [thing] that has struck me now is that Can it have been because of their own selfishness that [they] have made these demands of me?

My "youth" my gaiety, which they have obviously enjoyed, is suspect: But why must I blame myself for everything wrong even in my small world. There is no need for me to do—all that anyone happens to ask of me. I can't give my house away.

The Baroness looked at the house I lived in and said, looking also at the sign on the street corner, Ridge Rd.—Ah, Rich Road. It was meant as a cutting rebuff to my pretensions. And these things are the stuff of what I mean. These are the things which injure.—Surely I have wanted to give everything—

Perhaps my saving has been that I have actually done, selfishly, myself, what I pleased, as my fault has been that I have seemed to promise too much, more than I could fulfill. But I expected their generosity to understand that. Anyhow, I have been industrious hard working, saving in order to permit me to remain free of "the world" in order to be free to live with my friends. I have believed in a springtime of relationships in a slow unnatural rhythm which would cover my life, the spring of it going slowly and lasting say till I was forty five. Then I should have maneuvered myself into a position where I could go on, with my friends, and new friends. It has been a "fancy" perhaps, I should have lived carelessly in a more actual world, perhaps. Anyhow I didn't. And yet I am finding that I did after all.

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Anyhow, one place I have not compromised. I have faced the world where others imagined they could ignore it. I have asked no help. I wanted to do one thing, write. I have done it. I have done it uncompromisingly, out of the stuff I could gather while working in the face of as unpromising—as difficult a scene as need be. I do not do this because I love to seem myself beaten—

It can fairly be said that I chose my environment—It can be said that I chose it in order to keep myself from going too far, as a brake to the great liberalities. No. I have done what seemed closest, most needful, most immediately significant to me. I have worked where it seemed most profitable to me not from the cash viewpoint but from the point of view that I did not want to alight the material means of my writing since I believed that it all goes back to the character center, that writing is finally as Hartley has recently said, the man in all his parts—and some were ignoring playing with themselves in ways I don't admire.

Let them. I wanted work. Damned if I'd ask anybody for anything.

This (the preceeding) has no relationship to general theories but to me. So when I see a woman who offers me a passage—I offer her morning. A thing I have found true—talk chiefly—the bond is likely to be sealed. It is that, when I have chosen, that attracts them. (talk) Let it be a school girl doubtfully giving herself (through a proffered sexual surrender) whispering her little story, song sparrow in March—passage to a morning—which I am, since—

But the place is not empty. At least I have not found it so. There is an inhabitant, a presence— But too long devotion is fatiguing and the clarity of it passes. It is my—my firm devotion cries out in despair. I want to but the words will not come. I myself, being one only must do what I can to light the fire of my words which desire only one thing, to be near only one to remain constantly against that purity. It is a purity which is like the morning. It is a sunkissed morning—I see it every clear day from my east windows. If I could stay steady upon that strain I should desire nothing else.

So I truthfully say that every love is the aroma and the fires about one love. We say "she." It expresses what—all I am willing or care to say. She is there. I run from here when her image which I saw once in inspiration and had photographed on my spirit, a purity I have never had equalled in me. That is remarkably fast in me. Nothing even approaches it. It is curiously so. Even my worst behavior seems somehow an attachment of that purity. Whatever I say here is firm if that is firm. The Baroness was that to me—but she was schooled in a

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tougher school than mine—She was like Cortez coming to Montezuma and she wanted to do the same stupid thing he did. Destroy. They imagine somehow that clarity and delight are to be gained by shedding the blood of someone. No doubt it is true also—if it could not be seen in their eyes that they were after something else.

The Baroness laid seige to me for two years when she could easily have walked up my front steps and rung the bell any time she wanted to and my wife would have asked her to come in.

Damn these clandestine fakers. She was one in spite of her value. There have been others. Oh well.

But there has been good of striking profusion in them and I do not say that I am always the bravest or the most honorable in the world. But I have wanted one thing. Nothing else. The Baroness to me was a great field of cultured bounty in spite of her psychosis, her insanity. She was right. She was courageous to an insane degree. I found myself drinking pure water from her spirit. I found it so that is all. I could not go to bed with her. Disease has no attraction for me. I couldn't. But I did feel a shame.

The pure, the serious world of love—

Women—have a physical importance to me, quite apart from what they might turn into for my particular meeting. Men are obviously unimportant—

What do I live to see? Anything—with clear eyes. Young darkies carrying coal from a wagon and dumping it into a metal chute, or making bricks at Little Ferry. Anything—not especially the sexual orchid with its limp petals.

It is this I think that they must want of me, this freshness. It is all I have, really, to offer—apart from a swift sweetness in passing. This has proven so at any rate.

And so I find it. Her image which gave my young immature instincts the fact. Living. Actual. I offer it. They despise me for it and want another thing, another way and yet that is all I can offer. The most, at least, in my own conception.

Talk is what I give best—reflective of a clarity which I seek always. They wish me to remain— They insist or else I am even more insistent. I could resist the Baroness' siege—with difficulty, tormented—helpless to end it— It is a mean boast. She was poor, unhappy. I wanted to lift her up—couldn't—up for what I knew she was—

Therefore to me the sex is a useful thing whose function is that of a corridor to a clarity; of tremendous importance but passing interest. It is the thing beyond, which I share in common with children, not

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childishly, which I desire. I wish even to pass rapidly. I find I cannot hold the other satisfaction long. The way to it must be passed and repassed like a path to a well. But there is no lingering with sex with me. Affection is strong, in those I must use sex must be illuminated by what I desire beyond it. Then let us hurry with the business lingeringly enough to say it is true, a thing in itself, justifiable that others may stay here and find it an art or a universe, I do not know—but for me I wish it to pass, its fever to subside. The mind afterward is my field. Coming to that with the satisfaction of performance ensanguined in me the mind is lit, serene, the eyes are as if released from cages, the breath comes unobstructed and the mind rushes to its inventions.

I know well that this delight is passing also and that it owes to the completion of the round, through the tunnel, and that it will occur again but—again I will run swiftly.

The odors, the lights the fillamentous stimulae of the sexual contact, the languorous delights are well known to me. I know the building up of the constriction in every phase from the first electric shock to the fainter, refused parries. I see that it is a country. I too have lived there. Nevertheless it is not my country. The serenity of morning and the people who inhabit that Urania I love best. I desire them continuously even through the sexual tropic.

This is the thing that gives me my difficulty—

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"Corridor to a Clarity": Sensuality and Sight in Williams' Poems

William Marling

> The poet should be forever at the ship's prow.
> —Prologue to *Kora in Hell*

Among the women whom William Carlos Williams recalls in his *Autobiography*, none seems to have terrified the poet like the baroness Elsa Freitag von Loringhoven. A German émigré on the fringe of the *Little Review* circle around 1920, Loringhoven has been described by Jane Heap and Margaret Anderson, who published her poetry, as eccentric and promiscuous, but hardly dangerous. They seem to have sicced her on Williams as a playful test of his sexual liberality, but her offer to give the fastidious doctor a dose of syphilis—thus freeing his mind for art—sent Williams backpedaling. He could not evade her, however: she laid siege to his home and haunts, springing on him at inopportune times and imploring him for money, which he gave.[1]

The baroness remains for most readers of *The Autobiography* a picturesque character in a crowded life, but she troubled Williams so much that he wrote an essay about her. "The Baroness Elsa Freitag von Loringhoven," in Yale's Beinecke Library, reveals a good deal of biographical information that explains Williams' paranoia, but is of greater interest because for Williams the core of the baroness' threat concerned the relation of his sexuality to his vision.

Williams begins this essay with a meditation on friendship, admitting that he has deceived male and female friends alike with a promise of promiscuity on which he does not deliver, railing against the sexuality of painter Marsden Hartley, who apparently tried to seduce him, and of the baroness. After several pages of this free association, Williams realizes that he "uses" women for poetic ends: "So when I see

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a woman who offers me a passage—I offer her morning. A thing I have found true—talk chiefly—the bond is likely to be sealed. . . . But the place is not empty. At least I have not found it so. There is an inhabitant, a presence—"[2]

When Williams finds this theme of "talk" and sexuality, the tangents and associations give way. After pages of strikeovers and hesitancy he concludes with these stunning paragraphs:

> Therefore to me the sex is a useful thing whose function is that of a corridor to a clarity; of tremendous importance but passing interest. It is the thing beyond, which I share in common with children, not childishly, which I desire. I wish even to pass rapidly. I find I cannot hold the other satisfaction long. The way to it must be passed and repassed like a path to a well. But there is no lingering with sex with me. Affection is strong, in those I must use sex must be illuminated by what I desire beyond it. Then let us hurry with the business &&&&&& lingeringly enough to say that it is true, a thing in itself, justifiable that others may stay here and find it an art or a universe, I do not know—but for me I wish it to pass, its fever to subside. The mind afterward is my field. Coming to that with the satisfaction of performance ensanguined in me the mind is lit, serene, the eyes are as if released from cages, the breath comes unobstructed and the mind rushes to its inventions.
>
> I know well that this delight is passing also and that it owes to the completion of the round, through the tunnel, and that it will occur again but—again I will run swiftly.
>
> The odors, the lights the filamentous stimulae of the sexual contact, the languorous delights are well known to me. I know the building up of the constriction in wvwey phase [sic] from the first electric shock to the fainter, refused parries. I see that it is a country. I too have lived there. Nevertheless it is not my country. The serenity of morning and the people who inhabit that Urania I love best. I desire them continuously even through the sexual tropic.[3]

Williams' argument seems to be that sexual foreplay and coitus offer a way of gathering and discharging biological urges, emotions, conventions of thought and emotion. After sex comes clarity. There is ample biographical evidence that since adolescence he felt himself swayed by all strong feelings, a victim not only of sexual passion and a Romantic conception of love, but even of his parents' and his brother's opinions. He complained in his first book that strong feeling condemned him to "mad excess" and a "wayward press / Where Action's brazen helmet solely shines."[4] A theme of Williams' second book is

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already the difficulty of securing clear vision, though in "Postlude" he suggests a process for inducing it. This poem begins in the clarity of postcoital vision—"Now that I have cooled to you / Let there be gold of tarnished masonry" (*CP1*, p. 3)—and ends with a striking conjunction of forces and forms that Williams would explore for several decades.

> But you there beside me—
> Oh how shall I defy you,
> Who wound me in the night
> With breasts shining
> Like Venus and like Mars?
> The night that is shouting Jason
> When the loud eaves rattle
> As with waves above me
> Blue at the prow of my desire.
> (*CP1*, p. 4)

While it is difficult to point to a single aspect or adventure of Jason that mediates definitively between the opposition of Venus/Mars that Williams imposes on his lover, we may note several details from the myth consonant with his spatially oriented closure. The prow of Jason's ship, the Argo ("swift") was formed by Athena from a piece of oak endowed with oracular powers, including speech. By feats of priapic heroism (passage between the Cyanean rocks, plowing the field of Ares), Jason carried off the golden fleece, but his life afterward with Medea contextualizes for Williams the enmeshing social obligations (and eventual tragedy) of his actions. We may recall that Medea arranged her brother's death so that Jason could obtain the fleece, and that in some versions Jason dies while asleep under the stern of his ship, which collapses on him.

"Postlude" begins by thematizing Jason's conundrum: "I have cooled to you." Williams' mind "rush[es] to its inventions." His eye moves from the masonry to the "wall flowers" to his lover's hair, then he realizes that interruption by her is the greatest threat to his clarity. He asks how he shall "defy" his lover, thinking of her as embodying a network of social obligations, old habits of seeing and pre-voyage aspirations. Since she has for him two aspects—love and war, Venus and Mars, sexual liberation and deaths foretold—he is "wound[ed]" "in the night," which at first seems a mere prepositional phrase. But as the poem fails to achieve closure on its mythic allusions, the spatial implications of such elements as "night," on repetition, play greater roles. Jason connotes action against night, but also absence of vision. In the strikingly spatial resolution that Williams then achieves, the night is

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cut by the homologous shapes of the "loud" eaves and the prow of desire. The first triangular shape is "above" him, the second implied to be below him. This doubled triangle, up and down, silence and voice, mediates sexuality and vision for Williams and has its own history.[5]

Though Williams did not describe the "passage to morning" until his essay on the baroness, it represented a distillation of sexual experiences that dated from adolescence. The conjunction of "night," "eaves," "waves," and "prow" gives way, by a kind of spatial inversion, to the "corridor," "tunnel," and "path to a well" of the baroness essay. A critical incident in this transformation is given in *The Autobiography* when Williams describes his sexual molestation at age fourteen by a pederast in Geneva:

> One day Mother took us for the *tour de Lac*. I have never seen bluer water, nor whiter swans. The Alps were to our right—the Mole, especially familiar to me, in the middle ground, with its anthill-like summit that I climbed with the other kids, racing up the last hundred feet to try to beat them. I think I came in second at the top. The clear day, the breeze made me especially happy as, in my usual way on a trip of this sort, I jammed my body into the very foremost angle of the ship's prow to get the effect of which I was so fond—of being alone, no ship, no person, no sound but the wind in my ears as I flew with a slow lifting and falling over the crystal-clear lake. It was a thrill beyond anything I could imagine and I was enjoying it to the full.
>
> Then I became aware that I wasn't alone in my narrow heaven. Some one else was there trying to crowd in beside me. I was angry at the intrusion and determined to fight it out for my place. Turning a little to the side I saw it was a little old man with a beard, a man strikingly well-dressed and wearing a modish hat. I could have knocked his block off if I had to. He had a walking stick and using it as a fulcrum, he had somehow shoved his right hand into my crotch, from the front, putting on considerable pressure.
>
> Neither of us said a word. I merely backed away and left him, disgusted. Poor mother didn't know what to make of my story and told me in fact that I had imagined it. I avoided the shrunken up little creature for the rest of the trip, but the incident impressed me. (*A*, pp. 33–34)

Like his essay on the baroness, this passage contains a rich blend of spatial forms, physical forces, and emotions. It also shares organizational strategies with the essay and "Postlude," as all three attempt to subsume the sexual moment to a stabilizing form. In fact, this passage

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provides a spatial key not only to the baroness essay but to many of Williams' poems. As in "Postlude," one is struck by Williams' notion that sex interrupts vision and, in his visual construction, the juxtaposition of the horizontal, triangular shape of the prow with the vertical, triangular shape of the eaves or mountain.

Williams associates the vertical triangle of the "Mole" with juvenile, competitive aspiration: he arrives at the top "second" in a footrace. As biographer Paul Mariani has taught us, "second" was significant in Williams' life. Williams felt second in artistic ability to his younger brother Ed, a prizewinning architect. Ed won away Williams' intended bride, Charlotte Herman, leaving the poet her younger sister Florence. Would she be his Medea, dispatching the brother between the poet and the fleece? The sibling rivalry was fierce and lifelong, and takes its visual icon in the vertical triangle: a peopled world, one of artistic striving and competition, in which a consciousness of others and of one's conventional and social relationships in space prevails. Here Williams rarely feels "the satisfaction of performance ensanguined in me." He is too often second.

Juxtaposed to this reified world is the horizontal formlessness of the waves, the triangular prow in which Williams finds himself alone, not-in-the-world, conscious of an out-of-body forward motion, but seeing, or soon to see, clearly. In his wedge of motion toward clarity, pure sensation prevails. It is a "narrow heaven" of timelessness, of smooth flight over matter, in which constituent "reality" can be transformed or patterned: at the apex of the wedge one screens the essential from the tumult of experience.

But Williams is interrupted. The sexual moment prompted by the "fulcrum" which is the cane of the pederast vanquishes out-of-body forward motion and vision. It may seem natural that this visceral sensation should lead to overt sexual consciousness, but the fulcrum of the other disrupts Williams' solitary ecstasy—"the place is not empty." The "fulcrum"—the point of rest, typically triangular, on which a lever turns in moving a body—links the horizontal and vertical worlds. But it is only the coitus that makes vision happen, leaving him *alone* at the "well," in the "field," dissipating conventions as "the mind rushes to its inventions."

In the phenomenology of perception, it would be more accountable if Williams had experienced out-of-body forward motion toward the horizon, been interrupted, and raised his matrix of perception to the vertical—to a realm of socialized artistic competition and consciousness of others. In this way the result of his bracketing experience—what

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Husserl calls *epoche*—would be the reconstruction of the world in a new fashion. In the terms of phenomenology, an *eidetic* insight would reveal a new *eidos*.

But this happens neither in the *Autobiography* nor in the poems to be examined. Instead the spatial sequences replicate the experience that Williams had in Switzerland: they move from the vertical triangle to the horizontal triangle to the sexual fulcrum, then cast a faint, cold, almost retrospective light on the bare outlines of things, persons, or emotions—like paintings by Edvard Munch. Williams' rejection of social sanction extends even to the deeply seated, positivistic cultural consensus, for which he substitutes his own experimentally based paradigm.

In retrospect, the satyr of Geneva with his phallic stick seems more than a convention, perhaps a self-projection, a doubling that permitted Williams to escape from the insoluble dichotomy of fixity and formlessness. As innocent child and dirty old man, he could occupy both the triangle of arousal and the triangle of "Urania" with its clear emplotments and morning view. He can turn the fever of pure sensation on the object of eyes "released from cages." This transformation depends on the distracting touch, the postcoital stirring, as Williams is joined (interrupted) by the other. Someone, something presses behind and, as the poet turns, is *implicated* by his vision. The details that his freshness of vision seizes from this distraction are related to the preceding dynamism spatially. What had seemed dynamic is now reified, creating a profane twin. Williams flattens the perspective, he adds a foreground that begins in the moment of formlessness and narrows to the details of the "little old man with a beard, strikingly well dressed and wearing a modish hat." Standing forth in cold, lithographic precision, such details are Williams' way of "having at a distance"—what Husserl called *avoir*. In them he possesses not only the sought visual clarity but also the cold, satisfying, antisocial power to knock "his block off if I had to."

Williams' quest for an expressive visual/spatial vocabulary was buttressed by developments in modern painting. The English translation of Wassily Kandinsky's *Uber das Geistige in der Kunst* owes to the *Little Review*, which Williams later identified with the baroness, and with painter Marsden Hartley, whom he associated with the sex/vision question. "Kandinsky's work was, of course, well-known," Mike Weaver writes:

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> It was quoted in the *Little Review* in 1914. But it is not often recognized that it was Marsden Hartley who was the first person to introduce it to the English speaking world. In Germany in 1912 and 1913 Hartley met the Blaue Reiter group of painters, notably Kandinsky and Marc, and writing to Alfred Stieglitz about his visits to them, said that he knew that what he did himself coincided with Kandinsky's theories. In April, 1912, the first extracts in English appeared in Stieglitz's review, *Camera Work*.[6]

It is unlikely that Williams saw anything but reproductions of the painter's work up through 1920, when he quoted from Kandinsky in *Kora in Hell*. "The poet should be forever at the ship's prow," wrote Williams in his introduction. Kandinsky's influence on Williams seems to derive from the latter's discussions of the sex/vision question with Hartley, and to be due to the Russian's prose explanations of his spatial paradigms, rather than to his art.

Kandinsky's "little book" was startling, in its time, for its Bergsonian relation of spatial forms to social forces. Its first section was a long meditation on and rejection of art for art's sake, in which Kandinsky denounced artists dedicated to "means" or materials alone. He rejected positivism and materialism, urging artists to press forward in visionary, prophetic fashion. The object was not representation: "The artist sees what will be, and makes it seen." As exemplars he chose Wagner, Debussy, Maeterlinck, Schönberg, and von Webern, Rossetti, and Böcklin. These were the leaders, standing at the apex of a triangle that Kandinsky used as a metaphor for society. The harder the apex pushed upward, the more the mass of humanity was pulled along. The triangle was Kandinsky's paradigm for society and an essential icon in his painting. "Form alone," he wrote, "has . . . a power of inner suggestion." Horizontal lines were inherently peaceful, while vertical lines connoted a sense of action or emotion.

Kandinsky concluded his book by describing the three roles of the artist within his triangular conception of society, which Williams repeated verbatim in his "Prologue" to *Kora in Hell* (*I*, p. 26): "Every artist has to express himself. Every artist has to express his epoch. Every artist has to express the pure and eternal qualities of the art of all men."[7] But even as he appropriated, Williams was remodeling. The change he wrought valorizes the profane twin, the satyr. As he writes in a 1955 letter to Henry Wells: "the trinity always seemed to me unstable. It lacked a fourth member, the devil. I found myself always conceiving my abstract designs as possessing four sides. That was natural enough with spring, summer, autumn and winter always before me" (*SL*, p. 127).

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The instability of the triangle for Williams is not rectified by incorporating the devil, of course, but operationalized: made *eidetic*. Sensation piled up formlessly at the prow, and another person invaded his "*narrow* heaven." But after climax, that monumental absent term in Williams' poetics, the new perception, a stark delineation of fact, here identified with winter: the cold, the black and white, the devil. It was the hitherto suppressed, the term opposed to coitus, the hideous truth embraced: "I turned and ran," his use of the baroness, and her revenge on him.

Williams can be said to step on the stage of American poetic tradition with "January Morning" (1917) from *Al Que Quiere*. It is also a poem that deploys the pattern of triangulation, out-of-body forward motion, interruption, and a resulting new realm of detail. The poem opens on the ferry to Manhattan. As if remembering the "Mole" in Geneva, Williams glances back at his social milieu on the Jersey shore:

> the domes of the Church of
> the Paulist Fathers in Weehawken
> against a smoky dawn—the heart stirred—
> are beautiful as Saint Peters
> approached after years of anticipation.
> (*CP1*, p. 100)

The domes crowning the transepts and mixed with spires provide the vertical element of triangulation. Sections II through VII deliver precise scenes and sharp details set in the New York City to which the poet travels, at which he has not arrived. They anticipate the future, as Kandinsky advised. This prevision is as important as their appearance in the poem. The poet knows what he will see, evidence of what Heidegger termed *dasein*, an intentionality with relation to "being in the world."

In Section VIII Williams' field of vision contracts to the ferryboat, lingering on allusions that connote his conventional intent: "Arden," the quest for "the North West Passage—and through!" In Section IX his glance falls to the water—"the sky has come down to you"—and his visual narrowing renders most acutely the sensation of disembodied forward motion.

"The young doctor is dancing with happiness" as the tenth section commences. He is "alone / at the prow of the ferry." In this purely experiential realm, he "notices" the textures of "curdy barnacles" and "broken ice crusts." He contrasts the winter scene with its opposite, but he keeps sensual summer at a distance. The fourth term, the spatial

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enlargement or cold detail, may not be achieved until Williams turns on the fulcrum, makes his perceptual pivot—and in this poem, the explicit posting of the turn follows the vertical and horizontal triangles.

It happens that in Section XII "long yellow rushes bending / above the white snow patches" make "an angle" that replicates the angle of the prow the poet occupies. Such explicit doubling designates the moment of contact, the fulcrum, but here the poet will not "turn" until he probes the stasis of his form:

> what an angle
> you make with each other as
> you lie there in contemplation.

Williams then proceeds to a profane vertical: in the constricted space of the prow, he contemplates the claustrophobic view of someone dead

> staring up under
> [a] chiffonier at its warped
> bass-wood bottom.

The spatial reversal produces a dramatic effect: the first view is *down* on crossing yellow rushes that evoke the illusion of "the distant wood," the second view is *up* only inches at a "warped" wood bottom.

As in *The Autobiography*, Williams imagines an intruder. Here it is his English grandmother, aged and approaching death, the "devil" in the prosaic sense because she undid the domesticating efforts of Williams' mother (Mariani presents the evidence). Williams equated her life with obstinacy, intransigence, a limited depth of field; in a Yale manuscript, "The Three Letters," written around 1921, Williams developed a comparison between his grandmother and the baroness, as "interrupting" women. Williams' valorization of the intruder (and "the flapping flags," a vertical motif, at "half mast for the dead admiral") sets up the opposing intensity of the horizontal, out-of-body motion toward the horizon of

> the young girls [who] run giggling
> on Park Avenue after dark
> when they ought to be home in bed.

If they were "home in bed," sensation would not pile up as formlessly as it does "giggling / on Park Avenue after dark." This is a poem that "makes the round," that brackets detail at its center, ending on motion, on a reopening of vision onto the "corridor to a clarity" that produces it. The poem achieves part of its sense of giddiness by this reversal of visual strategies for containing motion and detail.

Although Williams was too curious a craftsman to dwell on one

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pattern, the spatial template of "Postlude" and "January Morning" is found in other poems, especially "The Attic Which Is Desire." The title of this poem, standing grammatically parallel to the first line, introduces the subject and the spatial matrix of triangulation, but takes a colder view of the potentiality the form holds than do the previous poems. This triangle is

> the unused tent
> of
>
> bare beams
> beyond which
>
> directly wait
> the night
>
> and day—
> Here
>
> from the street
> by
>
> * * *
> * S *
> * O *
> * D *
> * A *
> * * *
>
> ringed with
> running lights
>
> the darkened
> pane
>
> exactly
> down the center
>
> is
> transfixed
>
> (*CP1*, pp. 325–26)[8]

No "loud eaves" rattle here. This triangle is "unused," an "attic" in which desire becomes merely "bare beams." Clear vision has been socially marginalized by expectations of a "SODA." Williams does not linger: the point is that the shape is reduced to eidetic bareness; it is a vessel of potentiality. This poem concerns itself with *interruption*, with what Peter Schmidt has termed "the machinery of stimulating desire." The poet's prevision passes through the attic peak, an anticipated height whose inexpressibility he indicates by aposiopesis and descends

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to the opposed point of view. The view up / the view down, as in "January Morning," has a linear element, a "corridor to a clarity" that squares the triangular and leaves the poem running outward. "SODA" will light, presumably, in a moment, but it leaves the reader at a state of attention. Interruption is anticipated, not achieved. This technique, borrowed from contemporary painting, especially the ready-mades of Marcel Duchamp, privileges the "erotic atmosphere." Williams adapts the technique to his own spatial biography: to the initially triangular, barren attic, perceived from within, he opposes the subsequent "darkened / pane" whose light is imminent. This corridor *will* produce a clarity, but the critical interruption has not yet occurred. The reader must "see" beyond the edge of the page. The diction that gives rise to this effect is cold and winterish: "darkened pane," "down the center," "transfixed." If we await the word to appear longer than meet, we may realize that "soda" is not simply sweet, but also sodium carbonate, a bitter leavening agent.

Of the many other poems in Williams' oeuvre amenable to this reading, none is better known than "The Yachts." It is widely remarked for the way in which the preservation of the poem's "false start" leads to the poet's discovery of his real subject.

> Now the waves strike at them but they are too
> well made, they slip through, though they take in canvas.
>
> Arms with hands grasping seek to clutch at the prows.
> Bodies thrown recklessly in the way are cut aside.
> It is a sea of faces about them in agony, in despair
>
> until the horror of the race dawns staggering the mind
>
> (*CP1*, p. 389)

The discovery of the faces in the waves, across which the prow of the yacht cuts, is not simply thematic. It is also a spatial resolution consonant with the pattern of triangulation described above: Williams considers first the vertical triangles of the sails and fails to find a race (that is, an "interruption"), then turns to the horizontal. In the waves he finds material he had ironically "passed over," the faces, perhaps, of the baroness, Hartley, and others, cut by the "craft" to which he sacrificed them. Only seeing "as with waves above me" is Williams in command of the second perceptive matrix that makes the poem.

Williams' tendency to "close" the movements and spaces of his later poems via triangulation makes his earlier experiments with the form the more interesting. "Danse Russe" is usually remarked for the changes it works on the sonnet form, its painterly influences and self-confident

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narcissism, yet it is also a poem in which a change in the poet's spatial embodiment plays a major role. As commonly explicated, the poem begins in a sense of social responsibility: the poet's wife and child and maid are sleeping, while he has risen early to write. The long "if" clause containing these details associates them with the sun "above shining trees." The dominant element of this initial motif is the unseen, vertical "flame-white disc" of the sun "in silken mists." The principal transformation work of the poem will change the poet into a generative sun himself. The mediating presence of rectilinearity appears when the second "if" clause associates the pronoun "I" with "north room" and "mirror." These shapes give the poet an image of himself in motion ("waving," "singing"), satyr-like and "alone" in an autoerotic pleasure framed by the rectangle of "yellow drawn shades." By a kind of autochthonic power, Williams appropriates the sun from the room, mirror, and shades. He terminates his metamorphosis, using aposeopesis again, holding an image of himself *within* the corridor of "the yellow drawn shades." Williams etches no details here because there is no interruption. The rhetorical question that closes the poem—"Who shall say I am not / the happy genius of my household?"—emphasizes that this place *is* empty, as well as indicating satisfaction with the spatial transformation he has effected.

"To a Solitary Disciple" has been the object of exegesis concerning its relation to Italian futurism and paintings by Charles Demuth, for its advocacy of cubism over impressionism, for its somewhat polemical demonstration of how poetry provides what painting cannot. Yet the spatial relationships within the poem also command attention, and there is more subtlety to them than the antithesis of squat church and jasmine moon.

> Rather grasp
> how the dark
> converging lines
> of the steeple
> meet at the pinnacle—
> perceive how
> its little ornament
> tries to stop them—
>
> See how it fails!
>
> (*CP1*, p. 104)[10]

The lines do more than pass through the limiting (in both the architectural and social senses) ornament of the spire: they pass into a realm of infinite motion—"receding, dividing"—when they form the

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inverted twin of the triangle of the steeple. Within this second, illimitable and superior triangle, the moon has its cold, actual "eaten" imperfection. While Williams' conclusion recurs to the question of impressionistic color, his final words oppose the ineffable lightness of disembodied being in the second, superior triangle, to the "oppressive weight / of the squat edifice." The auditor to whom Williams addresses his explanation plays the role of interrupter, turning the poet from disembodiment to embodiment.

The "embodiment of knowledge," as Williams called it, is one of the hallmarks of his poetry. While one could draw the spatial scheme too rigorously in a single poem, the many prows and attics and steeples and "crossed sticks" of Williams' works have a logic. In such later poems as "Tapiola" Williams was still writing of the "attic room under the eaves" where the poet went "to defy the devil of emptiness." "To Daphne and Virginia" concerns itself with "a woman's world / of crossed sticks, stopping / thought," which is to be fecundated by the "odor of box," surely used in a punning sense. Williams also relived the journey across the Lac in "View by Color Photography on a Commercial Calendar." Triangularity caught and held meaning for Williams, sequestered it from the flow of formlessness. He then made the form, already a privileged icon in Western art, the richer by his private rebellions against it. No appreciation of his dialectic with the form is complete without the realization that these spatial evocations and analogues for emotion are all artfully suggested, not in their customary plastic media, but by mere words.

[1] William Carlos Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York: Random House, 1952), pp. 163–69.

[2] William Carlos Williams, "The Baroness Elsa Freytag von Loringhoven," p. 282, above.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 283–84.

[4] William Carlos Williams, "July," *Poems* (Rutherford, N.J.: Reid Howell, 1909), p. 20.

[5] Williams' ability to evoke physical forms and spatial relationships within his poems has received a good deal of critical examination lately. See Marjorie Perloff, "Lines Converging and Crossing" in *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981); Thomas Whitaker, "*Spring and All*: Teaching Us the Figures of the Dance," *William Carlos Williams Review*, 10 (Fall 1984); and Peter Schmidt, *William Carlos Williams, the Arts, and Literary Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1988).

[6] Mike Weaver, *William Carlos Williams: The American Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1971), p. 231.

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[7] Wassily Kandinsky, *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* (London: Constable, 1914), p. 5.

[8] Peter Schmidt's reading of this poem ("Some Versions of Modernist Pastoral," *William Carlos Williams, the Arts, and Literary Tradition*, pp. 38–39) places it within the pastoral tradition, which, if I understand him, shifts registers to comprehend the "coercive" and "ironic." While I think he places too much emphasis on phallic imagery and "mass market commodities," his contrast of Williams' and Sheeler's precisionism is most apt.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 71–72.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

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Williams and H. D., or Sour Grapes

Barry Ahearn

Remembering H. D. in his *Autobiography*, William Carlos Williams gives an account of her part in the marriage of Robert McAlmon and Bryher, and the subsequent departure of the happy(?) couple for Europe. He concludes with a recollection of a postcard he received shortly thereafter, "representing a scene from some hit then playing showing several actors, men and women with their hands in a pot of money, and signed, obscurely, D. H., in bold capitals. I accused H. D. later of being the sender, but she violently denied it. I never believed her" (*A*, pp. 177–78). Some of the notions Williams got into his head stayed there a long time. This was one of them. H. D. just *had* to have written that postcard, no matter what she might say. Williams' friend, Ezra Pound, dubbed him "Bull" Williams partly in honor of this capacity for mental occlusion.

Williams was rather quick to accuse. Why? The evidence against H. D. is not terribly convincing. In the first place, what could her motive have been for offering this oblique commentary on the marriage between an impecunious man of letters and the wealthy heiress? Williams makes no mention of that, but a few possible reasons are implied. H. D. may have been contemptuous of an arrangement that would allow McAlmon to live a life of ease; he had "sold out." Or Williams himself might have been a target for her scorn, since his farewell present to McAlmon and Bryher had been a box of rare orchids. Had Williams been guilty of splurging and showing off how much he could spend? No. He informs us in *The Autobiography* that he got them from a friend in Rutherford. He also does not say whether he paid for them, but implies that they cost little or nothing. It seems that if H. D.'s barb was directed at Williams it was misplaced. What other evidence does Williams offer? H. D. denied the accusation "violently,"

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he says—one more proof that she did send it, since only the responsible party would be so vehement when detected.

Most critics have tended to believe what Williams says in *The Autobiography*.[1] They have generally relied on his honesty and sincerity. Such faith in *The Autobiography* is naive. For one thing, it ignores the fact that Williams writing in 1950 and 1951 was but one of many Williamses. The Williams of 1906, for example, had quite a different view of H. D. than appears in *The Autobiography*, as we shall soon see.

There are questions we can ask about the postcard that Williams seems to have ignored. Why would H. D. bother to conceal herself behind the easily detected mask of reversed initials? More tellingly, why should she be so indirect in expressing her feelings? The H. D. we meet elsewhere in *The Autobiography* does not beat about the bush—quite the contrary. If *The Autobiography* were a novel, one could fault Williams at this juncture for inconsistency in character portrayal. She's simply not the type to dispatch cryptic postcards.

Did she really send it? The card still exists, though no one has yet thought of dusting it for fingerprints. (Too many researchers and archivists have handled it, anyway.) As Paul Mariani informs us in his biography of Williams, anyone who cares to go to the Lockwood Memorial Library at the State University of New York at Buffalo and look at the evidence will see quite plainly that the initials of the sender are not "D. H." but "A. H."[2] Williams misread the signature and somehow never noticed that he had erred. So much for the unknown "D. H."

A more likely candidate for authorship appears in the form of Alanson Hartpence, friend of Williams and Manhattan resident. Furthermore, there exists at least one other card in the Lockwood Library from Hartpence to Williams signed "A. H." So why did Williams misconstrue those initials and ignore the possibility that Hartpence was responsible? A psychological short circuit seems to have occurred in Williams. In order to make H. D. responsible for the card, he had to deliberately misread it. Or are we making too much of this? Was it just a simple error perpetuated for decades?

One way to look at the problem is to remember that there are other people involved in the story. Of these three, the one Williams seems to have cared about was McAlmon. Williams looked upon his friend as a coworker for the revolution in American letters. Then came the marriage, which stripped Williams of his friend and *Contact* coeditor. In *The Autobiography* Williams makes a point of telling how moved he was.

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"When he [McAlmon] told me, I literally felt the tears come to my eyes, whether from anticipated loss of the man's companionship and the assistance of his talents, or joy for his good fortune, I couldn't decide" (*A*, p. 176). His mixed emotions do Williams credit. The only indication we have of H. D.'s reaction is that postcard. It suggests she scorns not only Williams' orchids, but McAlmon and his "good fortune." It suggests, in short, that she has a sour view of the whole business, and that she feels no empathy for Williams (or McAlmon) whatsoever. Williams does not speculate about H. D.'s emotional response to the intrusion of McAlmon into her close friendship with Bryher.

So Williams was convinced that the postcard represented H. D.'s contempt. The anecdote demonstrates Williams' passion—on the one hand—and H. D.'s pettiness on the other. This belittlement of H. D. in *The Autobiography* does not square with other, contrasting views of her that the younger Williams once held. To understand why Williams had to believe that H. D. scorned him, we have to go back to the beginning of the century, when the medical student from New Jersey first encountered the young lady from Philadelphia.

In his biography of Williams, Paul Mariani cites a number of passages in Williams' letters that show an infatuation with H. D. Writing to his brother Ed on May 6, 1906, Williams reported that he had attended the May Day festivities at Bryn Mawr:

> I stayed over an hour or two after the show and roamed around the campus with her and then took her home. Do you know Bo I'm dead in love with that girl. She isn't good looking and she isn't graceful; she isn't a beautiful dresser and she cannot play any music but by Gee! She is a fine girl and she can have me alright.[3]

Ten days earlier he had also confided in Ed; that letter tells of spending a night at the Doolittle home, during which he "had a wet dream in her father's night gown."[4] This is the first instance Williams recorded of an incident involving H. D. that put him in an awkward, potentially embarrassing position. But Williams somehow found himself in that position time and again, not only with H. D. but with a good many other highly cultured men and women. The situation occurs so frequently in *The Autobiography* that it suggests a marked peculiarity in Williams' attitude toward these others rather than in their attitude toward him.

These two letters and others from the period indicate—as Mariani concludes—that some word stronger than "friendship" must be used to characterize Williams' feelings for H. D. What then was her response? Williams makes no mention in *The Autobiography* of his correspon-

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dence with H. D. Yet they did write to each other and Williams saved her letters. These letters suggest that H. D.'s attitude was friendly—not passionate. A mildly flirtatious tone marks her letters, but there is nothing intense enough to suggest a serious inclination toward the young doctor. She also may have irritated Williams by frequently mentioning Pound. In a letter of January 24, 1907, for example, she asks to see his poems, but also pauses to say:

> Does Ezra Pound write to you, I wonder? But even if he does I don't suppose he would tell you about his works. Do you ever see the Book News? Two of his articles have come out in it & there are more accepted, as well as poems, I believe—also Munsey's for November, I think it was, had a poem—But probably all this is chestnuts to you—
>
> Get busy, Billy, I should so like to know *two* of the rising young poets of the age.[5]

In her letters to Williams of 1907, H. D. shows a decided interest in his poetry. This artistic concern, however, need not be read as an indirect expression of sentimental affection for Williams as a man. He was Ezra's friend, someone she could write to about the man she cared for.

Williams tells us in *The Autobiography* that he was writing poems in those early years, but does not mention that he sent them to Ed and H. D. for their appraisal. One would assume that his efforts prior to the 1909 *Poems* (with the single exception of his excursion to Harvard to show them to Arlo Bates) were strictly for his closet (*A*, p. 54). Nevertheless, he did send H. D. poems for her comment, as the letters she wrote to him plainly indicate. In a letter of April 1907, she chided him:

> And about the Rosalind story you thought of sending—I see that you had second thoughts, and they are evidently in keeping with the Bromide proverb which says "Second thoughts are best."
>
> P.S. Please mister, I lower my dignity or my pride or whatever you choose to call it, and, in spite of the wicked way in which you talked about accepting the first part of that poem by "brute force" I ask for the second part.
>
> I suppose I'll get another frosty remark of like nature, but then I am, as you so aptly put it, "fundamentally bad," and people in that condition can stand more frost than poor mediocre good people—See?[6]

The phrases quoted from Williams' letter suggest he grew testy and irritated at H. D.'s response to his poetry. Students of sexual politics may find interesting the spectacle of Williams envisioning his poems

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being received with "brute force" by a "fundamentally bad" female reader.

Readers of *The Autobiography* who know nothing else of H. D. would hardly find in its pages a recommendation to consider her work. In fact, there is no mention—favorable or otherwise—of any of her writings. We learn that she is a poet, but Williams tells us no more. He also hints that her decision to become a poet was not her own, but resulted from her love for Pound (*A*, p. 68). If she imitates Pound in her artistic vocation, it comes as no surprise that she also adopts his love of European languages and life, thus losing her opportunity to participate in the creation of a genuinely American poetic. Williams had already come to this conclusion about H. D. in 1918, when he wrote the "Prologue" to *Kora in Hell*. In it he writes at length about the mistakes of the expatriates in turning their backs on America. He lumps together Pound, Eliot, and H. D., and contends that "E. P. is the best enemy United States verse has" (*I*, p. 26). H. D. hardly counts; she is merely a disciple of the great god Pound. Furthermore, in the "Prologue" as in *The Autobiography*, Williams has nothing to say about the quality of her work. Instead, in the *Selected Essays* and elsewhere, H. D.'s Bryn Mawr classmate, Marianne Moore, becomes the preeminent female poet of her generation. But then, Williams had never fallen in love with Miss Moore and lost her to another.

The sole account Williams gives of H. D. as critic of his poetry occurs in the "Prologue" to *Kora in Hell*. Williams begins his comment on her by printing her letter to him about "my long poem, 'March,' which thanks to her own and her husband's friendly attentions finally appeared there [in the *Egoist*] in a purified form" (*I*, p. 12). (There is no mention in H. D.'s letter—either in the edited or the full version—of Richard Aldington having a hand in the alterations to "March.") It soon becomes clear that Williams is using "purified" as a synonym for "emasculated." He goes on to explain to the reader that two years after the fact he can see that he was wrong to consent to the cuts. "But in any case H. D. misses the entire intent of what I am doing no matter how just her remarks concerning that particular poem happen to have been" (*I*, p. 13).

Williams does not tell us that he has deleted portions of the letter printed in the "Prologue." It is instructive to compare the complete letter H. D. wrote with Williams' abridged version. We learn that Williams' title for the poem was "Song of the Year." H. D. changed it to "March," a better title because it creates a double reference: to a month as well as to the marching figures on the walls of uncovered

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Mesopotamian cities (part iii of "March"). H. D. also suggested some other changes that Williams adopted: parts ii, iii, and iv of the poem begin where she recommended they should.

Considerably more than half of "Song of the Year" was thrown out to make "March."[7] It was not so much "purifying" as massive excision. In a part of her letter that Williams does not quote, H. D. asks his permission to "ruthlessly delete." This is an apter characterization of her editorial intervention than "purify." One suspects Williams tinkered with H. D.'s letter to cover up the facts in the case of "March." After all, in 1916 he had readily consented to major surgery on the poem. Could he in 1918 really tell his readers that he had changed his mind about the whole business only two years later? If he did, it would reflect rather badly on his judgment. It was easier for Williams to leave the impression that he had consented to minor alterations.

Though Williams' psychological prepossession to see himself as the butt of H. D.'s laughter, scorn, ridicule, and high-handed editing colors almost everything he wrote about her, there is one notable exception to this tendency. Once, and once only, Williams put on public record his admiration for her work. The following review of her 1925 *Collected Poems* appeared in the *New York Evening Post Literary Review* on May 23, 1925.

H. D.'s Collected Poems Recall Author's Dash into the Raging Deep

The aristocracy of those who read poetry with great care, especially the poems of their own day, for the real light there is in them do not fear a recruit to their number; they hope even for one to join them, now and again, who has also subtlety of understanding in these matters. He will find great reward for his application, such a one, in the "Collected Poems of H. D."

Not before the whole had been printed in a single volume was it possible for us to grasp the full significance of this work in the world of modern poetry; the connotive use of the Greek model, which is to H. D. a nearly constant practice, has made the single pieces, as they have appeared, seem more detached from the present than was actually the case. But the book has brought the whole together as a clear story. There is an extraordinary vista of a strong rise, beginning with youth and extending over a long period of a woman's growth and blossoming and further rise from that flower into a world beyond it, that should be to every American a strengthening pride, were we an actual people, to wear every day and everywhere while we suffer every day those spiritual catastrophes which every day surround us, making our lives a spectacle of disorder and emotional stupidity.

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On the first page we encounter all there is of technical armament. The firmness, the authenticity of the strongly characterized meter is at once apparent and gives us no further concern. It is, if you must have a name—free verse. There is a plain gait. The country is classic—and the Greek names more natural to us than ever they would be in the Greek originals from which frequently she is translating. But there is a difficulty to be acknowledged.

Bearing a Greek scene constantly in mind, H. D. excludes so much that seems the daily near concern of our lives it is as though the delimiting lines of her imagination converged too near. But, as we look, they pass the meeting point and from there go diverging again; from there begins a new world, imaging our own, revealing it, mirror like, cast upon the perfect Greek of which we, in amazement, see ourselves—the imperfect shadow: it is ourselves cast backward in our unreality upon the great permanence of beauty that lives here about us (in such work as this), the world *in fact alive*, rescued from impertinences.

Such a book is slow to be printed in America; it affronts us. What do we care for Greece, for *Greece*. That's as far as we get through the difficulties. It begins with a jerky rhythm, as of a young girl loosed upon a shore. I shall not forget how one June day in 1905, H. D. joined a house party of us at Point Pleasant, N. J. It was an uncertain morning with a heavy surf. She, seeing the ocean for the first time that season, or for the first time in several years, perhaps, carried to the point of ecstasy by her delight in the waves, rushed into them headlong, not knowing how to swim, not having gauged their force, not waiting for the others. She was crushed, trampled, swept out, drowned. We dragged her unconscious from the water and she was at length revived. So it has been with her all along, save that from other, different but no less devastating encounters her poems have resulted. In the first part of the book the best are the familiar "Orchard," "Acon," "Hermes of the Ways."

The earlier assaults culminate in the short poetic pageant, "Hymen," which, occupying the middle of the book, occupies also the middle of its philosophy. This is not an altogether successful poem; but it illustrates, by a beginning dull, perhaps, as life itself, how H. D. rises, with intrepid reading, rewarding us finally by a transport of joy which liberates us wholly.

The best is in the last third of the book, when the strokes of anguish have begun to fall and the meter ripens; yet you will not come at it with full understanding till you have read from the start. Such poems as "Simaetha," "Circe," "The Islands," are not surpassed in American letters.

In life there is no escape for any of us save by "*Mehr licht*!" a

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> passage through the waist of the difficulty to an area where expansion is possible—nay limitless, the illimitable spirit—of which the breath is poetry. Such is the "mystery" of H.D.

In 1925, Williams, thinking well of H. D.'s work, advises us that he was in on the rescue of H. D. from the waves, one of the "we" who saved her. It is characteristic of Williams that as he warms to her poetry he can once again imagine himself as the ardent admirer rushing into the foam to save the girl. But by the time of *The Autobiography*, when his silence about her work is absolute, he tells us he appeared on the scene after the dramatic rescue had already taken place.

The review also features language consonant with that found in the early poetry of H. D. The beginning paragraph, with its reference to the fit few, "the aristocracy" of poetry readers, echoes an elitist tendency in H. D.'s verse. Note also the floral metaphors in the "woman's growth and blossoming," which point back to the numerous floral images in her work and link it with Williams' own floral proclivities. There are even subtle acknowledgments of her reliance on the Greeks in such remarks as "we, in amazement, see ourselves—the imperfect shadow: it is ourselves cast backward . . ." (Plato's Cave).

The review represents the high-water mark of Williams' regard for H. D. as a poet. He never saw fit to expand on it or reprint it. When the time came to put his life and career on paper, a rather different view of H. D. was offered to the world.

Williams' account of his early acquaintance with H. D. in *The Autobiography* entirely omits his brief history of unrequited love. Nor does he speak of H. D.'s reading of his early verse. He even implies that he concealed his poetic ambitions and productions from her: "It wasn't something I wanted to talk about, for as a matter of fact I had in my own opinion produced nothing" (*A*, p. 68). Williams also recalls saying to the jealous Ezra in 1905 or 1906, " 'For God's sake . . . I'm not in love with Hilda nor she with me' " (*A*, p. 68). Insofar as this leads the reader to conclude that Williams never cared for her, it is a lie. He was in love with H. D., at least to some extent, but got no comparable response from her. Of course we need not be surprised at this distortion of the facts forty-five years later in *The Autobiography*. Other affairs of the heart are glossed over or are left unmentioned. Consider, for example, Williams' regret for the loss of the close relationship he had with his brother. He leaves out the fact that their relationship foundered on their rivalry for the affections of the same woman—Charlotte Herman (*A*, p. 55).

Williams' account of his relationship with H. D. begins with their

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early acquaintance in 1905 and 1906. "Together with Hilda Doolittle (H. D.) I discovered, in those days, the wonders of *Aucassin and Nicolette,* the prose and the verse alternating" (*A*, p. 52). A brief mention, but it puts the two young people on an equal footing—they shared a literary discovery. Yet before the sentence ends, Williams' remark about the alternation of prose and verse points the attentive reader in the direction of Williams' own later works, especially the then recently published *Paterson*.

Next, Williams and H. D. go for a walk in the country. The horizon darkens; a storm approaches:

> Instead of running or even walking toward a tree Hilda sat down in the grass at the edge of the hill and let it come.
>
> "Come, beautiful rain," she said, holding out her arms. "Beautiful rain, welcome." And I behind her feeling not inclined to join her mood. And let me tell you it rained, plenty. It didn't improve her beauty or my opinion of her—but I had to admire her if that's what she wanted. (*A*, p. 69)

This H. D. is not so much communing with nature as playing to an audience of one; she might as well be on stage. Her posturing does not impress Williams; it may not even be designed to do so. Perhaps H. D. simply decided to demonstrate a bond with nature that poor Williams cannot match.

On the following page, Williams describes the rescue of H. D. from the combers, which he recalls—erroneously—as taking place several years later. The incident suggests that H. D.'s naive appreciation of nature meets its just reward:

> I suppose she wasn't used to the ocean anyhow and didn't realize what she was about. For without thought or caution she went to meet the waves, walked right into them. I suppose she could swim, I don't know, but in she went and the first wave knocked her flat, the second rolled her into the undertow, and if Bob Lamberton hadn't been powerful and there, it might have been worse. (*A*, p. 70)

Several years supposedly separate the walk in the fields from the party at the beach. The time lag indicates that H. D. has maintained her misunderstanding of natural forces far too long. Furthermore, the account of this distressed damsel being carried from the waves by the "powerful" male seems all the more significant if the reader knows the central images in H. D.'s first book of poems. Her helplessness in the face of the deep renders slightly ludicrous the heavy emphasis on ocean and shore in *Sea Garden*. In the 1925 review of her *Collected Poems*,

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Williams included various qualifiers to explain her rush to the water; H. D. was "seeing the ocean for the first time that season, or for the first time in several years." The apologetic note virtually disappears in the *Autobiography* version of the story.

Even before discussing rainstorms and breakers, Williams has prepared the reader of *The Autobiography* to conclude that H.D.'s ethereal conception of the natural world has little to do with the world as it is. He does so by sketching her father: "A tall, gaunt man who seldom even at the table focussed upon anything nearer, literally, than the moon. . . . Hilda . . . was, I think, much like her father, though I never saw her pay him any particular deference" (*A*, p. 67). In Williams' eyes, she and her father exhibit a remarkable ability to dwell in a world—or worlds—of their own. Perhaps the waves H. D. thought she was wading into were actually out of a poem by Swinburne—or so Williams would have us conclude.

If that is what Williams wants the reader to think, it is consistent with the attitudes he imputes to H. D. elsewhere in *The Autobiography*. For the H. D. we meet in Williams' book frequently seems to think she embodies higher, purer, more refined values than Williams can ever hope to attain. Williams managed to convince himself that H. D. had consistently looked down on him. For example: "The Ballet *Salade* I liked well, but it might have been the girl who tried to dislocate her knees and elbows assuming the angular poses assigned to her. When I told H. D. I had enjoyed that one, she merely laughed in her cryptic and irritating way as much as to say, 'you *would*' " (*A*, p. 215). "Cryptic," indeed. After all, she's in the habit of sending anonymous postcards.

There is another episode in which Williams offers his poetry to H. D. for her comment. He recalled it seven years after *The Autobiography* in *I Wanted to Write a Poem:*

> We were both writing poems, too shy to let the other see. But once, after being teased for weeks and with my heart in my mouth, I brought her what I had been intent on when I should have been studying pathology. It was an ode, after Keats I presume, on of all things the skunk cabbage! She listened incredulously and then burst into a guffaw, catching her breath the way only Hilda could—almost hysterical. I never tried it with her again. (*IWWP*, pp. 7–8)

Williams goes one step further than he does in *The Autobiography*. He admits that he did show H. D. at least one of his poems. But the remark, "I never tried it with her again," is not correct. (It would more likely be true if Williams were not describing a poetic overture to H. D.,

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but a romantic overture.) The anecdote also portrays Williams in an embarrassing position. Once again, he recalls H. D. laughing at him. Williams had gotten into the habit of imagining her that way.

Williams' reputation for directness, bluntness, and honesty has obscured his occasional bouts of deviousness and spite. A look at his portrayal of H. D. in *The Autobiography* reveals a surprising degree of malice on his part, malice disguised as candid recollection. (It is not only in *The Autobiography* that Williams pays off old scores. The characterization of Charlotte Herman in the Stecher trilogy can be read as Williams' revenge on another woman who spurned his affections.) The enigmatic sarcasm he attributes to H. D. in sending the postcard is a projection of an element in his own personality. No wonder Mariani can report that as late as 1961, H. D. "had still not forgiven him for what he'd written in his *Autobiography* about her and Bryher and McAlmon."[8] And H. D. may have taken an opportunity to respond. *End to Torment,* her memoir of the ardent young Pound, passes over in silence that other admirer, "Billy" Williams.

[1] Barbara Guest finds Williams' account odd. "Williams is more mysterious than the postcard. Why did he show such rancor toward H. D. at this time, and later in his *Autobiography*?" She speculates that Williams may have nourished a lingering resentment that H. D. preferred Pound to him. She also wonders whether Williams was altogether pleased with H. D.'s career as a poet. But since her subject is H. D. rather than Williams, Guest leaves the questions hanging. Barbara Guest, *Herself Defined: The Poet H. D. and Her World* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), p. 139.

[2] Paul Mariani, *William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), p. 179. I can vouch for the accuracy of Mariani's vision; the signature is indeed "A. H."

[3] MS. letter, Lockwood Library Williams papers. Cited with the permission of The Poetry/Rare Books Collection, University Libraries, SUNY at Buffalo.

[4] MS. letter, Lockwood Library Williams papers.

[5] MS. letter, Lockwood Library Williams papers. Williams' letters to H. D. have not survived. They may have been consumed by the same fire her parents kindled to burn Pound's letters to H. D.

[6] MS. letter, Lockwood Library Williams papers.

[7] Some of the deleted portions are printed in *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams,* ed. A. Walton Litz and Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1986), I, 493–94.

[8] Mariani, *William Carlos Williams,* p. 757.

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American Vernacular: Objectivism, Precisionism, and the Aesthetics of the Machine

Henry M. Sayre

> Machines, yes, but as a subsidiary to a deeper reality lost to science completely: the American thing.
>
> —*The Embodiment of Knowledge* (p. 113)

In 1925 William Carlos Williams published no poems. Nor, apparently, did he write any. Early in the year he did finish work on *In the American Grain*, which had occupied him for most of 1924, writing the chapter on Poe and the short sketch of Lincoln, and he saw the manuscript through to publication in November. He also wrote, again early in the year, a letter for *Aesthete 1925*, at the invitation of Malcolm Cowley, taking on H. L. Mencken, whose writing on the American language he would come to admire within a decade, and in the course of the following months he managed a few more essays, notably a piece on Marianne Moore, but there were no poems. In 1926 only six poems appeared, but two had been written in 1910. His first significant collection of poems after *Spring and All* appeared in the fall of 1928 in Ezra Pound's magazine *The Exile*. Consisting of twenty-one poems interspersed with eighteen chunks of prose journal, all begun on board the *S.S. Pennland* in the autumn of 1927 as he was returning from Europe where he had left his family for a year, it was entitled *The Descent of Winter*, announcing the onset of a new, bleaker poetic season after the earlier advent of *Spring and All*. "This is winter / winter" he incanted in another poem written at the same time (*CP1*, p. 277). Whereas in *Spring and All* he had sensed that he was on the edge of

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discovering a form adequate to his tasks—"One by one objects are defined," he had written in the volume's title poem, "It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf"—by the late 1920s he was beginning to wonder. In December 1931 he would admit, in a long "Open Letter" to Kay Boyle, "I have written little poetry recently. Form, the form has been lacking. . . . I have been working with prose, since I didn't know what to do with poetry" (*SL*, pp. 129–30). In a letter to Louis Zukofsky (February 10, 1933), he claimed that though he had time to write, he was in no mood to do so.[1] And although in 1935 and 1936 he published two small books of poems—*An Early Martyr* and *Adam & Eve & The City*—he remained wracked by self-doubt. He explained in a letter that the last poem in *An Early Martyr* was the result of Pound's having accused him of "pissing" his life away. The poem begins and ends, picking up the chant of a group of boys in the street:[2]

> Any way you walk
> Any way you turn
> Any way you stand
> Any way you lie
> You have pissed your life
> (*CP1*, p. 401)

In the middle stanza, Williams answers the taunt, but the syntax is wholly ambiguous:

> From an effectual fool
> butting his head blindly
> against obstacles, become
> brilliant—focusing,
> performing accurately to
> a given end—
> (*CP1*, p. 402)

Has he already become brilliant? Or is this, rather, in the imperative mood, the poet telling himself he'd better open his eyes and begin to focus, or else? The ambiguity is at any rate unmistakable, and in the end Williams gives the taunt the last word. In another letter to Zukofsky, written not long after in February 1937, he compared his poetry to dirty water emanating from a broken pipe: "I'm not proud of my recent quality," he wrote, "I'm not trying to guide it but weakwilled let it dribble, all sorts of trash."[3]

A look at the actual numbers is revealing. In the years 1917–23, including *Spring and All*, Williams wrote and published roughly 170 poems, twenty-five *more* than he wrote and published in the following *fifteen* years. This represents a decline in production of almost 60

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percent on an annual basis, from an average of over twenty-four poems per year in the seven years up to and including *Spring and All* to between ten and eleven per year over the course of the following fifteen years. Significantly, while he had published more than three poems in periodicals for every piece of prose in the years 1917–23, from 1924 to 1938 he published over 140 prose pieces compared to approximately 107 poems. In the "Author's Introduction" to *The Wedge*, published in 1944, he would write: "Prose may carry a load of ill-defined matters like a ship. But poetry is the machine which drives it, pruned to a perfect economy" (*CP2*, p. 54). The point, simply stated, is that if between the wars Williams aspired in his writing to the aesthetic perfection and economy of the machine, or the "brilliant focus" of which he spoke at the end of *An Early Martyr*, in actual fact he was more apt to produce a prosy "load of ill-defined matters"—and he knew it. This is *not* to say that Williams was necessarily writing only bad poems from 1924 to 1938—and it is probably worth reminding ourselves that he was writing a good deal of very fine fiction in these years, especially short fiction—but there is a certain "falling off," one which Williams himself recognized, a feeling that the good poems, and there were some, were coming less often, or at least less easily.

The question, of course, is why? Why, after the extraordinary output which marks the years spanning *Al Que Quiere!*, *Sour Grapes*, and *Spring and All*, this sudden diminishment of power? Was it simply a matter of dejection, Williams' recognition of his lack of recognition, underscored, as it was, by the commercial failure of *In the American Grain*? Or was he simply, for the better part of two decades, "gearing up" for *Paterson*, the long poem which as early as 1927 he had begun to feel it was his destiny to write? ("All that I'm doing . . . will go into it . . . . Paterson is really—part of it," he wrote that fall in a journal that was, probably, the continuation of the daily, shipboard writing he had begun on the way home from Europe the previous summer, a continuation of the material that he would develop into *The Descent of Winter* itself.)[4] He managed, this first go at *Paterson*, an eighty-five line poem, for which, in 1927, he was awarded the *Dial*'s $2,000 poetry award. However much he might have envisioned cramming into the poem, eighty-five lines was, as Paul Mariani has put it, "about as much as he could coax his imagist muse into flying for him."[5]

It is useful, I think, to bracket this period, on the one end, by the 1927 "Paterson," Williams' first notable success after *Spring and All*, and on the other, by the famous "Author's Introduction" to *The Wedge*, the last book of shorter poems published before *Paterson I*, which,

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incorporating in part the earlier poem into itself, appeared in 1946. For it is, in a sense, a question of *length* that engages us, the shift from the *economy* of the imagist poet, the poet of "The Red Wheelbarrow" and "Between Walls," to sprawling loquaciousness, the virtual profligacy, of the Williams/Paterson giant. But to come at the problem in terms of length is, I think, a mistake. It is, rather, a question of *control*, or regulation. Controlling a short poem is easy. Its vision is, essentially, delimited—to, for instance, a few chickens and a wheelbarrow, or a broken bottle between walls. But regulating a long poem is something else again. It requires, as Williams already knew at the end of the 1920s, real knowledge. "It is knowledge," he wrote in *The Embodiment of Knowledge*, "that alone solves multiplicity. It is knowledge that is the basis of art—that knows how to change and acknowledge the multiple-variety of its coin" (*EK*, p. 80). The question is, then, what sort of knowledge, what wisdom, did *Paterson* come to embody?

Probably one of the most famous, if least understood, of all William Carlos Williams' many pronouncements about the nature of poetry is his declaration, in the 1944 "Author's Introduction" to *The Wedge*, that the poem is "a machine made of words." These are his exact words:

> To make two bald statements: There's nothing sentimental about a machine, and: A poem is a small (or large) machine made of words. When I say there's nothing sentimental about a poem I mean that there can be no part, as in any other machine, that is redundant.
>
> Prose may carry a load of ill-defined matter like a ship. But poetry is the machine which drives it, pruned to a perfect economy. As in all machines its movement is intrinsic, undulant, a physical more than a literary character. In a poem this movement is distinguished in each case by the character of the speech from which it arises. (*CP2*, p. 54)

This was, in 1944, by no means a new idea for Williams. He had said more or less the same thing seven years earlier, in a short article written for the *Columbia Review*: "Think of the poem as an object," he put it on this occasion, "an apple that is red and good to eat—or a plum that is blue and sour—or better yet, a machine for making bolts."[6] This same movement in the direction of the machine can be traced as far back, in fact, as an article written for the magazine *Others* in 1919: "Poets have written of the big leaves and the little leaves, leaves that are red, green, yellow and the one thing they have never seen about a leaf is that it is a little engine. It is one of the things that make a plant GO."[7] Three years

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later, Williams wrote a letter to the *Little Review* congratulating the magazine on its previous Picabia number. In 1915, soon after publishing a group of machine drawings in the relatively obscure magazine *291*, Picabia had explained to an interviewer from the New York *Tribune* that "almost immediately upon coming to America it flashed on me that the genius of the modern world is machinery, and that through machinery art ought to find a most vivid expression." Moved by the feeling that Picabia had here introduced and articulated what had since asserted itself as the dominant aesthetic position of the day, Jane Heap, the *Little Review*'s editor, had republished some of the original *291* drawings, including his self-portrait, the almost totally abstract *Fantaisie*, and a large number of his more recent machine paintings.[8] Williams' reaction represents his first full statement of a machine aesthetic:

> The Picabia number of the *Little Review* is a distinct success: it gives me the sense of being arrived, the sense of being on the tracks or resting on its wings firmly in the air if you prefer. Surely everything else in America, everything new being published seems, beside the present L.R., to be the model of an engine made of wood to represent the power it does not possess. . . . I speak of the *Little Review*, you see, as if it were an object, as if it were a piece of sculpture.[9]

The string of analogies at work across this series of statements, spanning the years 1919 to 1944, is revealing. The *Little Review* is "an object"; likewise, we are to "think of the poem as object"; not only is this object analogous to "a piece of sculpture" (it is not so surprising to find Williams drawing analogies between literature and art), but also to a variety of machines—machines for making bolts, engines, trains, airplanes. Williams is even capable of thinking of these new art machines as natural—like leaves or plums or apples. Nature, it would seem, is a fabric of machines, an economy of "undulant" and "physical" movements. So, too, a book of poems.

This aesthetic of the machine—and the string of analogies it fits into—is worth examining in more detail, not only because there is a great deal more to be said about it in terms of Williams' own appeal to the American vernacular, what he called the "American idiom," but also because it has a lot to do, I think, with the general malaise affecting Williams' poetic work at the time. In the 1920s and 1930s a machine aesthetic dominated virtually all modern styles and movements (and those that did not adopt it, reacted against it). Its impact can be immediately detected in Russian constructivism, in the Dutch de Stijl, in

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Germany at the Bauhaus and in the Neue Sachlichkeit (or new objectivity) movement, in Italian futurism, in Dada, in French cubism and purism, and in America, precisionism, objectivist poetics, and especially in the "straight" photography initiated under Alfred Stieglitz's direction but carried on by Paul Strand, Charles Sheeler, and others. Though the machine aesthetic undergoes various kinds of emphasis in each of these various manifestations, I believe a certain common aesthetic drift can be articulated, one which Williams undoubtedly recognized and which in all likelihood defined for him the fundamental direction that the modern avant-garde artist was bound to explore.

The Machine Age Exposition, sponsored by the *Little Review* in 1927 in New York City, provides an appropriate starting point to approach both the machine aesthetic and Williams' relation to it. In the first place, virtually every contemporary movement in the arts was represented: the futurists by Enrico Prampolini's essay "The Aesthetic of the Machine and Mechanical Introspection in Art"; cubism by the sculpture of Jacques Lipschitz and Alexandre Archipenko, which was accompanied by his essay "Machine and Art"; there was a large section of Russian constructivist work, and an equally large contribution from de Stijl, including several Space-Time constructions by Theo van Doesburg and his painting *Card Players*; there was a section on the new American skyscraper architecture with an essay and drawings by utopian architect Hugh Ferriss, and another from the Bauhaus, including photographs of the new Bauhaus atelier at Dessau designed by Walter Gropius; Louis Lozowick would contribute an essay which would come to define the American precisionist movement, as well as a great deal of his painting and drawing, such as his *Machine Ornaments* and a selection of his series on American cities, including, possibly, at that time his most recent painting, *Minneapolis* (Figure 1); there were Dada decorations by Hans Arp and machine-age costume designs by Tchelitchew; Charles Demuth exhibited the paintings *Business* and *From the Window of the Chateau*, and Man Ray the painting *Chess*; there was a large group of straight photographs by Ralph Steiner; and interspersed among all this were machines and machine parts—gears from the Boston Gear Works, valves from the Crane Company, a Curtiss airplane engine, a Hyde windlass propeller, a coffee grinder from IBM, and a Studebaker crankshaft.

The jury which was called together by Jane Heap to select the work included Williams' old friend Charles Demuth and his new friend Charles Sheeler, whom he had met in August of 1924, his rival Marcel

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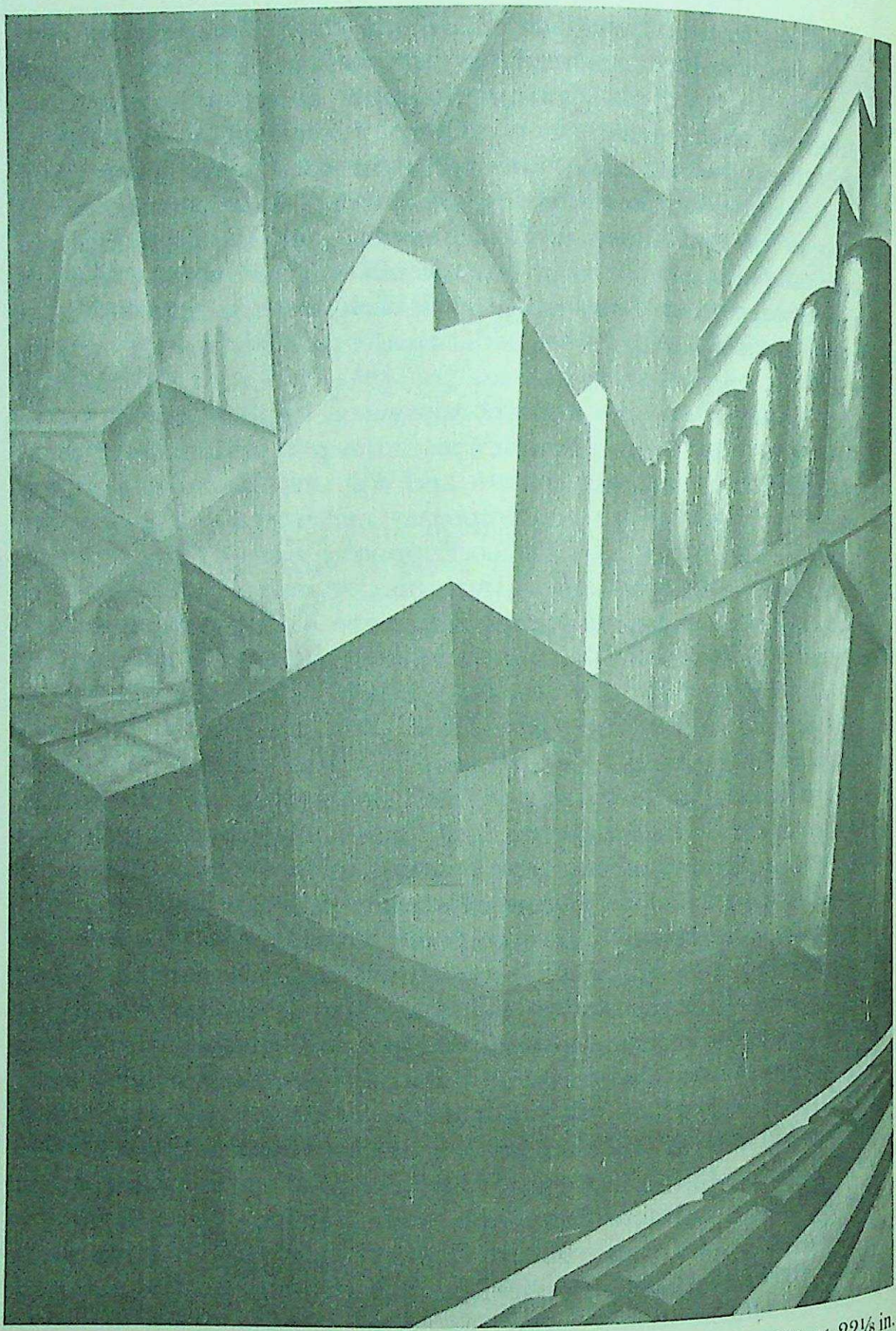

Figure 1. Louis Lozowick, *Minneapolis*, 1926–27. Oil on canvas, 30⅛ × 22⅛ in. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966.

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Duchamp, the architect Hugh Ferriss, and Lozowick, whose work he had praised in a letter to John Riordan in January 1926.[10] Despite the usually ironic, even low regard in which both Duchamp and Demuth held the machine, the exhibition was uniformly pro-machine, as if whatever reservations Demuth and Duchamp might one time have felt had, by May 1927, largely evaporated. In fact, the only really acerbic anti-machine pronouncement that I have located in the avant-garde journals between 1923 and the Depression is in a long *transition* editorial coauthored by Eugene Jolas and Elliot Paul in March 1928 summing up the magazine's first year of publications. They wrote:

> We deliberately placed ourselves at a point that might make it possible for us to work for . . . the destruction of mechanical positivism, for the opening up of the real sources of creation by delving into thought liberated from skyscraper logic. . . . Skyscraper lyricists and humanists vie with each other in the attempt to hammer out a philosophy that would be the final consecration of the machine age, of action, of reducing humanity to the role of an ensemble of automata.[11]

But a year and a half later, introducing Charles Sheeler's photographs of the Ford River Rouge plant to the readers of *transition*, even Jolas would submit to what he called "The Industrial Mythos":

> Charles Sheeler came to Paris last spring and showed me the photographs of his conception of industrial America. I felt in them a remarkable sense of dynamic magic, and a revelation of the fantastic in the camera. He gives the plastic-objective motif a new dimension. . . . His camera gives us the finest imaginative possibilities through light and dark arrangements which approach the abstract and crystal purity of poetry.[12]

Clearly there was something in the machine which even its detractors could find attractive.

The specific example of Duchamp, in this case as so many others, is helpful. "I used to walk around the streets of old Rouen," he would tell an interviewer about the origins of his work on *The Large Glass* in 1913:

> One day I saw an actual chocolate grinder working in a shop window, and it fascinated me so much that I took it as a point of departure. . . . Yes. The mechanical aspect of it influenced me then. . . . I couldn't go into the haphazard drawing or the paintings, the splashing of paint. I wanted to go back to a completely *dry* drawing, a *dry* conception of art. I was beginning to appreciate the value of the exactness, of precision. . . . And the mechanical drawing for me was the best form for that dry conception of art.[13]

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The key words here are dry—which is to say anti-expressive, *objective*—and its correlatives, exactitude and *precision*, words not coincidentally related to the "plastic objectivity" and "abstract and crystal purity" which Jolas would later discover in Sheeler's photographs and related to the poetics of Zukofsky's objectivism as well. The machine, whatever its negative dimension—a dimension which would come crashing down upon Europe with the eruption of war within months of Duchamp's revelation in the streets of Rouen—offered an aesthetic purified of the expressive, of "sentimentalisms," to use one of Louis Zukofsky's favorite epithets. The machine aesthetic offered Duchamp a way to escape what Zukofsky would later call "the personally lyric," the expressionist's "overweening autobiographies of the heart.[14] (These particular words, incidentally, occur in the context of Zukofsky's remarks on Williams' work in a review of American poetry during the 1920s. He gives Williams credit, obviously, for avoiding such sentimental pitfalls.)

In *The Green Box*, the collection of notes and directives for *The Large Glass*, Duchamp on one page calls for a "painting of precision, and [a] beauty of indifference." The beauty of indifference is realized, I think, in Duchamp's studied objectivity. In the *Glass*, the figures for this objective precision are the so-called *Oculist Witnesses*, the designs for which Duchamp traced from standard French optical charts, working meticulously for over three months, onto a silvered section of the glass. This interest in optics resulted, simultaneously, in the creation of actual optical machines, the first of which he constructed with Man Ray in New York. It was called *Rotary Glass Plates (Precision Optics)*, and it consisted of five glass plates painted with black segments of circles which turned on a metal axis powered by a motor, so that continuous circles were formed when it was set in motion. The problem was that there was no way to control the engine—it quickly went out of control, the glass flew off, and nearly killed Man Ray. In 1925 Duchamp constructed a second version, the *Rotary Demisphere (Precision Optics)*, which when set in motion created a three-dimensional illusion of optically spiraling circles moving in and out from the viewer.[15] This work appeared on the cover of the *Little Review* in the Spring of 1925.

This series of works elicits all kinds of possible readings, conflating vision and voyeurism, the sexual and the mechanical, but it is certain that Duchamp was delighted with these optically precise but visually ambiguous works. On the same page in *The Green Box* that he called for this art of precision, there is another note demanding of himself an "Irony of affirmation: [its] differences from the negative spirit of

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irony," he explains, "[being] dependent solely on Laughter."[16] This notion of irony helps us to understand the double relation of Duchamp to the machine. "Irony is a playful way of accepting something," he explained elsewhere. "Mine is an irony of indifference. It is 'meta-irony.'" As Harriet and Sidney Janis have explained: "Irony [for Duchamp] functions like an activating element, causing a pendulum-like oscillation between acceptance and rejection, affirmation and negation, and rendering them both dynamic and productive."[17] Similarly for Williams, in *Spring and All*, "destruction and creation / are simultaneous":

> woe is translatable
> to joy if light becomes
> darkness and darkness
> light, as it will—
>
> ("Light Becomes Darkness," *CP1*, p. 214)

Disaster can be averted, in Williams' words, "by simply rotating the object," like some rotary precision optic machine. Thus, for the ironical Williams, in the face of the "decay of cathedrals," the movies become "a moral force."

This ironic affirmation also helps us understand the painting of Williams' good friend Charles Demuth. For one thing, it has always been a source of confusion for Williams scholars that the painter of such highly ironical works as *Incense of a New Church*, which Williams owned and which James Guimond has described as revealing the "absurd difference between the wealth and power of American society and its drabness and insensitivity," should also apparently celebrate the machine in his poster portrait of Williams, *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold*.[18] Karal Ann Marling, however, has gone a long way toward recovering the double posture of Demuth in regard to the mechanical-industrial landscape in an extended discussion centering on the irony of Demuth's *My Egypt*.[19] He points out that after 1923, when he quit work "forever" on *The Large Glass*, Duchamp had more and more occupied himself with the study of the Egyptian pyramids, and Demuth was almost surely aware of his interest. Furthermore, Le Corbusier had opened his 1923 *Towards a New Architecture* with nine photographs of American grain elevators (Figure 2). "Egyptian, Greek or Roman architecture is an architecture of prisms, cubes and cylinders, pyramids or spheres: the Pyramids, the Temple of Luxor, the Parthenon, the Coliseum, Hadrian's Villa," Le Corbusier wrote. Their sense of mass he felt to be the basis of architecture: "Thus we have the American grain elevators and factories, the magnificent *First Fruits* of the new age."

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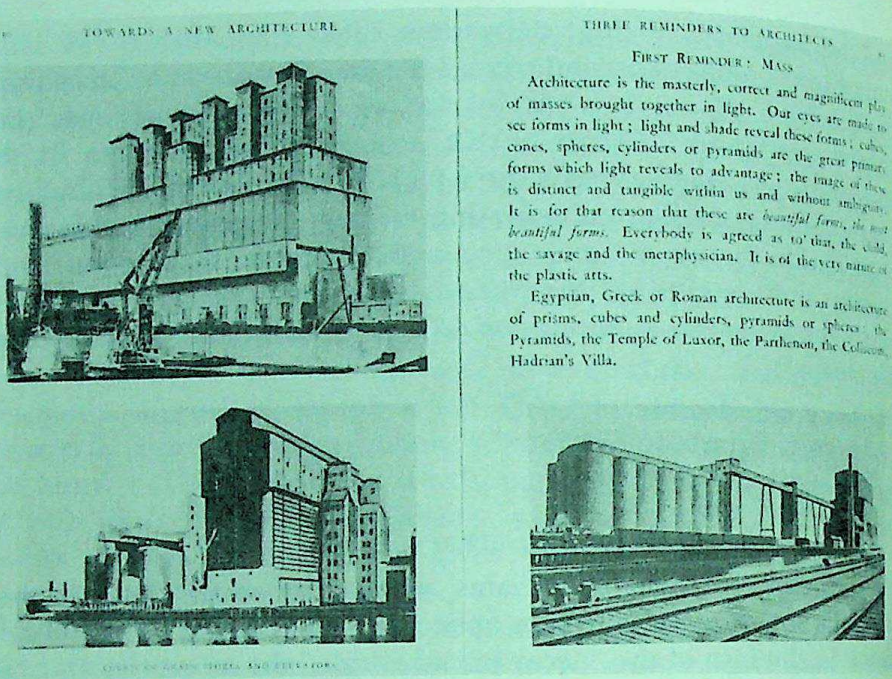
TOWARDS A NEW ARCHITECTURE

THREE REMINDERS TO ARCHITECTS

FIRST REMINDER: MASS

Architecture is the masterly, correct and magnificent play of masses brought together in light. Our eyes are made to see forms in light; light and shade reveal these forms; cubes, cones, spheres, cylinders or pyramids are the great primary forms which light reveals to advantage; the image of these is distinct and tangible within us and without ambiguity. It is for that reason that these are *beautiful forms*, the most *beautiful forms*. Everybody is agreed as to that, the child, the savage and the metaphysician. It is of the very nature of the plastic arts.

Egyptian, Greek or Roman architecture is an architecture of prisms, cubes and cylinders, pyramids or spheres: the Pyramids, the Temple of Luxor, the Parthenon, the Colosseum, Hadrian's Villa.

Figure 2. From Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*. On left, Canadian grain elevators taken from Gropius; on right, American grain elevator provided by Roché.

Five of the nine photographs had been brought from America to France by Henri-Pierre Roché, an intimate of Duchamp and the Arensbergs in New York, and Le Corbusier reproduced them with four others in the first issue of *L'Esprit nouveau* in 1920. They were subsequently published twice, in 1921 and in 1923, by Theo van Doesburg in *De Stijl*, and in two Russian constructivist magazines edited by Kassak and Moholy-Nagy in 1922 and 1923.[20] The other four grain-elevator photographs were evidently pirated by Le Corbusier out of the 1913 *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Werkbundes* edited by Walter Gropius.[21] When the English translation of *Towards a New Architecture* appeared in New York in 1927, Demuth could not have helped but be aware of the pervasiveness of the silo/pyramid analogy.[22] Their essential design and conception certainly lies behind Sheeler's later paintings of Henry Ford's River Rouge plant, especially the famous *Classic Landscape* and *American Landscape* (Figure 3). But Demuth, more than Sheeler, was particularly aware of the irony involved in this relocation of Egyptian monumentality. As Barbara Haskell has pointed out in her catalog to the Whitney Museum's Charles Demuth exhibition, "Egypt—the

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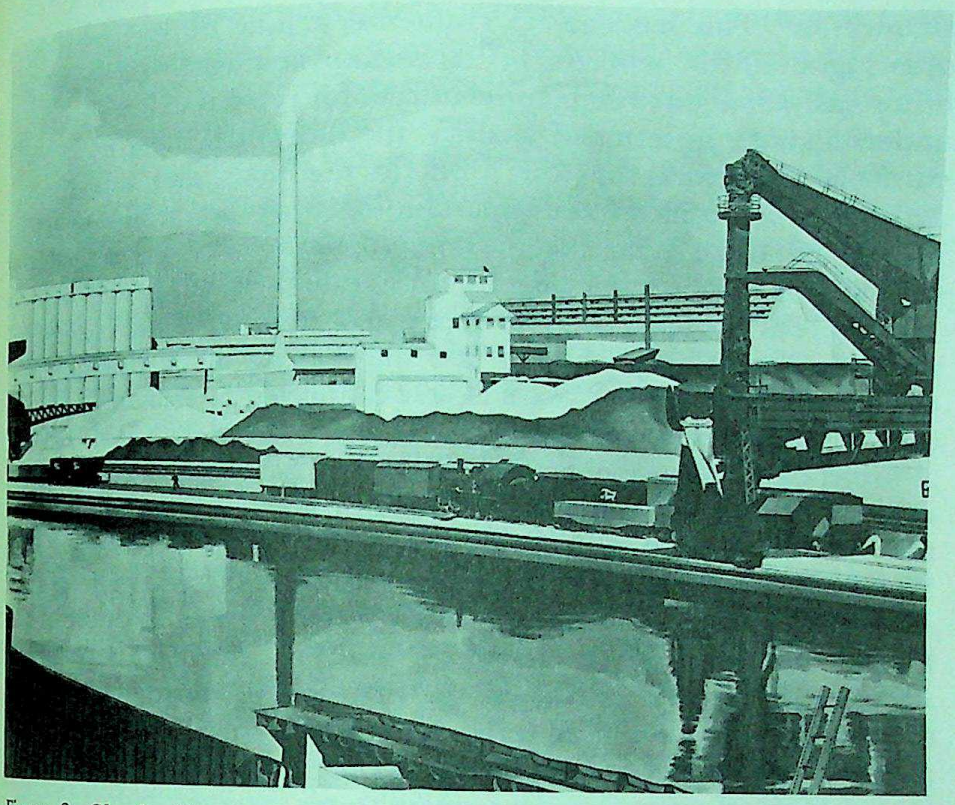

Figure 3. Charles Sheeler, *American Landscape*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 24 × 31 in. Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller.

Hebrew word for which means 'trouble'—is at once a symbol of the Jews' oppression and the point of reference for their self-identity and emergence as a distinct people."[23] Demuth may have felt trapped in his hometown, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where this Eshelman and Sons grain elevator was painted, but Lancaster, he recognized, was also the source of his American identity as a painter.[24] Like Williams' movie houses, Demuth's grain elevator bears witness to the spirit of both negation and affirmation with which the artist approaches it.

At least as important as the sense of irony developed in Demuth's machine aesthetic is the apparent synthesis, in *My Egypt*, of different, even competing directions in modern art—from the example of Duchamp and the new architecture of Le Corbusier, to the painting's stylistic reliance on an admittedly simplified cubist idiom and its insistence on celebrating the monumental presence of vernacular

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architecture. This tendency to synthesize stylistic differences is very often ignored by scholars of modernist aesthetics, especially art historians, who tend to emphasize instead, for reasons that are perfectly understandable in terms of analysis, the individual integrity of each particular movement or "ism." But at the time, and especially in America, what seemed more important was what the various styles had in common. It was in this that the modern, or the avant-garde, or *l'esprit nouveau*—or whatever one might want to call it—would be defined.

There is not space here to give a full account of the collision of movements and "isms" that go into the making of precisionism and objectivism, the two "isms" most closely connected to Williams, but they are both profoundly synthesist in spirit, and a fair idea of their roots in a broad-based machine aesthetic can be established with a brief chronological survey of the kind of rhetoric about art and the machine that virtually inundated the avant-garde journals in this country after World War I.[25] Perhaps the best place to begin is the Winter 1922 *Little Review*, the issue after the one in which Williams' letter in praise of the Picabia number had appeared. There, in the continuation of Apollinaire's *Aesthetic Meditations*, the first part of which Williams had specifically singled out in his earlier letter, the style of Williams' favorite painter, Juan Gris, was described as having its origins in "the metallic constructions of engineers, department stores, garages, railroad tracks, aeroplanes. . . . Juan Gris contents himself," Apollinaire wrote, "with clearness, scientifically conceived. The conceptions of Juan Gris are always clear-cut, and this clearness, no doubt, will one day throw out parallels."[26] As Williams well knew, these words had been written originally nearly a decade earlier, and the parallels which Apollinaire had foretold were not everywhere apparent.

In its following issue the *Little Review* began the two-part publication of Fernand Léger's "The Esthetics of the Machine." In his own work at the time, Léger had begun to produce "paintings with as their main theme 'objects' isolated from space and without anything in common between them. I felt," he said, "the object, which had been neglected, overlooked, could replace the subject."[27] In the essay, which Williams would not have failed to notice was dedicated to Ezra Pound, Léger wrote: "Beauty is everywhere. . . . Machine beauty, without artistic intention, is important because of its strictly geometrical and architectural organization. I have thus to introduce you to a new order—the architecture of machinery."[28] A year later, Louis Lozowick helped Jane Heap put together a special issue of the magazine dedicated to the Russian constructivists: "Here is a group," Heap

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explained, "who have broken with painting and sculpture and have become engineers of art. . . . They study the weight, texture and psyche of each material and then treat it with precision, organization and balance which produces 'constructions.' "[29]

The language here, in fact, is almost identical to the description of the Russian constructivists in the 1930 *Voices of October: Art and Literature in Soviet Russia*, to which Lozowick contributed the chapter on "Soviet Painting and Architecture," similar enough to suppose that Lozowick authored Heap's description. In the later essay Lozowick goes on to explain the relation of the constructivist object to the machine in terms that are remarkably similar to Williams' sense of the poem's relation to the machine: "The Revolution, the Constructivists said, requires an art that will have roots in the standardized industry of its time. . . .This does not mean that [the artist] will copy the machine; he will build his own work with the same precision of clearly defined form with the same order in the mathematical relation of parts, with the same economy in the choice of means and the nice adjustment of structure to function."[30] This, in turn, is the gist, nine years later, of Williams' appreciation of Charles Sheeler's paintings at the retrospective organized at the Museum of Modern Art in 1939: "Their quality is singularly uniform, lucid and geometric from the first . . . the cool and thorough organizations today about us, familiar in industry" (*SE*, p. 234).

Sheeler, in fact, had exhibited, with Lozowick, at J. B. Neumann's New Art Circle in the first months of 1926. The work he displayed there was reviewed in a long article by Robert Allerton Parker in the May *International Studio*, a magazine which rarely dedicated space to modern painting let alone significant space to modern American painting. The article's subhead proclaimed "The Artist Paints with the Cool and Calculated Precision of a Scientist," and went on to elaborate: "Sheeler seeks to disengage, with a precision that at times seems almost surgical, the essential forms of his object from all the mere vicissitudes through which it has lived; to sacrifice as beside the point . . . any possible sentimental association."[31] Williams surely knew this essay, and he could not have ignored its medical metaphor. Like Lozowick's formulation of constructivist aesthetic position, Parker's statement prefigures Williams' "Author's Introduction" to *The Wedge*. When Williams later writes, "There's nothing sentimental about a machine," it is to this same object, freed of sentimental association, that he refers. Perhaps moved by the reception of the Sheeler exhibition, John Riordan, with whom Williams was regularly corresponding, sent Williams an essay in August entitled "The Theory and Practice of Precision Poetry."[32]

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Of all the precisionist painters, Lozowick was probably the most intimately acquainted with the European avant-garde, and his association with Sheeler during the middle and late 1920s helps to account for the substantial change in Sheeler's art which takes place in 1929. Lozowick had spent three years in Paris and Berlin beginning in 1919, and he could count as his good friends the Russians Ivan Puni, Naum Gabo, and El Lissitsky, the Hungarian Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and the Dutch de Stijl artist Theo van Doesburg.[33] In Paris he had become acquainted with Léger and Le Corbusier. We know that his painting *Cleveland* was used to illustrate an article by Le Corbusier and Amédée Ozenfant in *L'Esprit nouveau* in 1923.[34] It also seems fairly certain that Lozowick's rhetoric—both plastic and verbal—was influenced at least as much by the purists and Le Corbusier as by the constructivists. The similarity of his own pen-and-ink *Machine Ornaments* to Léger's ink drawings of Machine Elements is unmistakable.[35] And the entire impulse for the 1927 Machine Age Exposition, for which he was such a driving force, seems anticipated in such moments as the reproduction, in *Towards a New Architecture*, of a Delage front-wheel brake captioned by Le Corbusier as follows: "This precision, this cleanness in execution, go further back than our reborn mechanical sense. Phidias felt in this way; the entablature of the Parthenon is a witness. So did the Egyptians when they polished the Pyramids."[36]

Williams, at any rate, was certainly acquainted with Le Corbusier's work—probably as much as anything through his brother Edgar's own work as an architect, in which Williams always took an active interest (they discuss Le Corbusier briefly in the 1937 essay/dialogue "The Basis of Faith in Art"). Williams owned the French edition of the Ozenfant and Le Corbusier *La Peinture moderne*, which he probably purchased in Paris in 1927, and one cannot help but hear in the refrain of Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture*—"A house is a machine for living in"—Williams' own later "A poem is a machine made of words."[37]

The similarity between Lozowick's essay "The Americanization of Art," which appeared in the Machine Age Exposition catalog, and Le Corbusier's *L'Esprit nouveau* manifestos, some of which were reprinted in *Towards a New Architecture*, has been noted elsewhere.[38] Like Le Corbusier, Lozowick calls for a new "spirit of objectivity excluding all emotional aberration." Furthermore, he writes:

> The dominant trend in America of today, beneath all the apparent chaos and confusion is towards order and organization which find their outward sign and symbol in the rigid geometry of the American city: in the verticals of its smoke stacks, in the

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> parallels of its car tracks, the squares of its streets, the cubes of its factories, the arc of its bridges, the cylinders of its gas tanks.
>
> Upon this underlying mathematical pattern as a scaffolding may be built a solid plastic structure of great intricacy and subtlety. The artist who confronts his task with original vision and accomplished craftmanship . . . will define with precision the space around objects and between them; he will organize line, plane and volume into a well knit design. . . . The true artist will in sum objectify the dominant experience of our epoch in plastic terms that possess value for more than this epoch alone.[39]

It is upon this sense of objectivity and precision in art, of an aesthetic based upon revealing the pattern, organization, and design beneath the chaos of experience, that both precisionism and objectivism are founded. And it is precisely such an approach to painting which Sheeler believed he had finally achieved in his great 1929 canvas *Upper Deck*. When he finished the work he felt: "This is what I have been getting ready for. I had come to feel that a picture could have incorporated in it the structural design implied in abstraction and be presented in a wholly realistic manner."[40] Like Le Corbusier, Sheeler's reference was Greek art: "The Greek miracle," he wrote in 1925, "was accomplished by the perfect adjustment of concrete form to abstract thought. . . . [A] geometric basis was the internal structure, skillfully concealed, around which was built the objective aspect of nature with all of its sensorial attributes."[41] For the first time, in *Upper Deck*, Sheeler felt his painting was founded upon just such a geometrical basis. "Starting with *Upper Deck*," he would explain, in a metaphor that specifically evokes the new architecture, "I have sought to have a complete conception of the picture established in my mind, much as the architect completes his plans before the work of bringing the house into existence begins."[42]

Immediately after finishing the painting Sheeler left for Europe. It was there that he showed his photographs of the River Rouge plant to Eugene Jolas, who would quickly print them in *transition*. It was also on this trip that he displayed a group of the Ford photos—side by side with work by Berenice Abbott, Paul Outerbridge, Ralph Steiner, and Edward Weston—at the famous *Film und Foto* exhibition in Stuttgart. The Bauhaus photographers were well represented, and here for the first time he became acquainted with the artists of the German new objectivity movement—George Grosz, Otto Dix, Max Beckmann, and others. Some of their work was startlingly like Sheeler's own—and Jolas' inclination to label Sheeler's photographs "magic realism,"[43] the alternative name for the New German Objectivism, especially Max Beckmann's, is a sure sign that the analogy was recognized by

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Sheeler—but it would be a mistake to think that precisionism was very indebted to the German example.[44] Like the *Film und Foto* exhibition itself, precisionism was part and parcel of an international style, and it had already reached its climactic expression at River Rouge and in *Upper Deck*. In the words of Samuel Kootz, reacting to the River Rouge photographs:

> There is no personal interference with the objects shown. The objective attitude assumed by Sheeler makes for a calm, detached expression. . . . There are no tricks, no attempts to secure those charming little nuances that woo the spectator. Only valid motifs are used, stripped of everything but the essential forms. The object is enough, if the object be plastically significant.[45]

It is, of course, just such a sense of modern photography's accomplishment that led Zukofsky to introduce the new "objectivist" poetics to the world with a photographic metaphor: "(Optics)—the lens bringing the rays from an object to a focus."[46] Such precision optics, devoid of subjective (i.e., "sentimental") interpretation, had all along been the aesthetic aim of the "straight" photographers. Photography, according to Paul Strand writing in 1917, "finds its *raison d'être* . . . [in] an unqualified objectivity. . . . This objectivity is the very essence of photography."[47]

From this point of view one of the most important moments in Sheeler's work is the distinction he makes between what he achieved in *Upper Deck* and the painting which came immediately before it, *Spring Interior*. "It may be seen," Sheeler wrote, "that *Upper Deck* differs much in its execution from *Spring Interior*, the canvas which immediately preceded it. In *Spring Interior* the planning proceeded as the picture developed: the structure of the picture is much more loosely woven."[48] The distinction is roughly equivalent to a distinction which I have outlined elsewhere between the two types of poem which Williams was writing at the time: on the one hand, the generally shorter, more descriptive and objective poems which possess a recognizable stanzaic pattern, and on the other, the longer, more emotionally convoluted poems which apparently possess no predetermined structural pattern but whose planning seems to evolve as the poem develops.[49] As Lisa Steinman has suggested, Williams' attraction to this second kind of more loosely structured poetry accounts for his otherwise surprising irritation with Sheeler's precisionist clarity: "Someone should smash his camera and open his brain," he wrote to Constance Rourke in 1938.[50] Almost without exception poems of this more loosely structured variety are profoundly subjective—including the elegiac poems Williams wrote

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to his mother, his father, Charles Demuth, D. H. Lawrence, and Ford Madox Ford. They tend, in short, toward what Zukofsky damned as "the personally lyric," the expressionists' "overweening autobiographies of the heart."

My point is that most of these longer poems are not, properly speaking, objectivist. In *The Autobiography* Williams defined objectivism in terms that will by now seem familiar:

> The poem being an object (like a symphony or a cubist painting) [or, if you will recall, an apple or a plum or a machine] it must be the purpose of the poet to make of his words a new form: to invent, that is, an object consonant with his day. This is what we wished to imply by Objectivism, an antidote, in a sense to the bare image haphazardly presented in loose verse. (*A*, p. 265)

The poems Zukofsky chose for inclusion in *An "Objectivists" Anthology* in 1932 eschewed, by and large, the sentimental "I"—only in the few older poems in the volume (chosen, one supposes, to give a sense of Williams' development) does it appear. And in most of them the stanzaic pattern is regular. There is no sense of the haphazard or the "loose." And they are, for the most part, purely descriptive.[51] Yet despite Zukofsky's championing of this sort of verse—despite in fact Zukofsky's careful editing[52]—the loose, baggy, subjective poems continue to get written throughout the objectivist period. What Sheeler banned after *Upper Deck* kept reasserting itself in Williams' art. To paraphrase again the letter to Zukofsky quoted earlier, Williams persisted in letting all sorts of trash dribble forth.

Even at his most descriptive and notational, Williams would usually charge a poem with some sort of subjective, emotional intensity. Consider, for instance, the opening poem in *The Descent of Winter*, in which the poet precisely describes an oval disc bearing the number 2 to indicate the number of the berth above his own number 1 berth in his cabin on the *S. S. Pennland* as he returned home from Europe, alone:

> My bed is narrow
> in a small room
> at sea
>
> The numbers are on
> the wall
> Arabic 1
>
> Berth No. 2
> was empty above me
> the steward

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took it apart
and removed
it

only the number
remains
2
(*CP1*, p. 291)

But the poem is more "about" isolation that it is Williams' cabin; it is about the fact that Williams had just left his wife and his two sons in Europe for a year. If there had been someone in Berth no. 2—say, Floss—he would not have been alone, but the berth had been taken apart and removed by the steward, leaving only a sign designating his family's absence—his wife and two boys "two bright nails / like stars / beside / the moon"—gone (*CP1*, p. 292). His descriptive, objectivist poems are almost always so loaded, if not always so personally, then, with a kind of class consciousness. As Robert von Hallberg has noted, "the characters of Williams' poems, especially during the 1930s, are locatable in class terms: the poor, the old, the recently immigrated, the laborers . . . a hobo couple. These subjects make a political interpretation of the poems inevitable."[53] What von Hallberg does not say, but what we need to perhaps remind ourselves of, is that to be political in these terms in the 1930s was also to be impassioned.

As attracted as Williams was, then, to precisionism, objectivism, and the aesthetics of the machine, they were finally antagonistic to at least a part of his sensibility. As much as it helped to develop a poetic economy in Williams which most of us value, becoming an "objectivist" stifled, to put it bluntly, another side of him. His struggle to find a form, a struggle that continued throughout the 1930s, was not, then, a question of discovering some design into which he might fit his objective vision. He was capable of finding that, whenever. It was a question of discovering a poetic form which could accommodate both the objective eye and the sentimental "I" at once, and it was complicated by the fact that he did not trust, as virtually no modern "ism" at the time did (except surrealism, which strongly appealed to him), what that second, more personal style might come up with.

But come up with something it did—namely *Paterson*, that unruly beast. In a notebook at Yale entitled "Studiously Unprepared, notes for various talks & readings May 1940 to April 1941," Williams called for

> an attitude toward the subject matter or the materials of which verse is to be made that is inclusive—not selective: based on the importance of form (Rembrandt, side of beef). . . . Modern

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> poetry is not selective. . . . It is inclusive and comprehensive by its definition: to raise or enlarge the imagination to new areas of understanding. It says nothing of what shall be admitted. Nothing is excluded. How can it be?[54]

Nothing can be excluded, *including* the personal. With this realization, undoubtedly inspired by his sense of the inclusiveness, as a whole, of *The Complete Collected Poems* which had been published in 1938, Williams would finally, after fifteen years of struggle, move on. Zukofsky had recognized the antagonism of the expressive self to the objectivist vision, but he had failed to understand, as Williams would, that "antagonistic cooperation is the key" (*P*, p. 177), that they both must dance, hand in hand in the poem.

There is, finally, a profoundly formalist pull to objectivist and precisionist aesthetics. When the poetic object is "sincere" (as opposed to "sentimental"), "pure," "precise," "clear" (as opposed to "loose"), authority rests in it, not with the poet or reader. Williams finally strains against these objectivist and precisionist standards, attempts not so much to seize authority from the poetic object as to enter into a dialogue with it, thus allowing his reader the same luxury. He rejects the aesthetics of the machine for the aesthetics of collage, the rhetoric of precision for the rhetoric of inclusion. That is why, I think, as the 1930s wore on, Williams directed more and more attention to "the American idiom" as an *object* of study, recording it precisely, attempting to discover its inherent forms.

The "American idiom" was, first of all, "loose," and in this it distinguished itself from the manifestations of idiomatic Americana that Williams' acquaintances in the visual arts exploited. But it is important to recognize—and again, such recognition gets lost in the predominant rhetoric of art historical writing—that American modernism, particularly precisionism, draws at least as much on vernacular sources and examples as it does on the European avant-garde. And it is important, further, to recognize that the European avant-garde artists who most affected American modernist painting—Picabia and Duchamp, particularly—were none too enamored of the predominant cubist idiom of European painting. They responded to New York, to the American skyscraper and the American machine, because it seemed *new* to them, more modern than cubism itself.

Cubism seemed to them, in fact, vastly traditional, occupied with the same problems of seeing, however radically it attacked them, that had occupied the Western imagination since the Renaissance. Duchamp

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had quit painting, early in 1913, because, he said, he wanted "to put painting once again at the service of the mind."[55] *The Large Glass* was based, as he later said, on a "mathematical, scientific perspective . . . giving less importance to visuality, to the visual element, than one generally gives in painting."[56] It became, in fact, like the game of chess:

> A game of chess is . . . a mechanical reality. The pieces aren't pretty in themselves, any more than is the form of the game, but what is pretty—if the word "pretty" can be used—is the movement. . . . In chess there are some extremely beautiful things in the domain of movement, but not in the visual domain. It's the imagining of the movement or of the gesture that makes the beauty, in this case. It's completely in one's grey matter.[57]

Both Duchamp's and Picabia's adoption of mechanical drawing as a means for representation, in works like the *Chocolate Grinder* and the *291* drawings, can be usefully considered in light of French copyright law, which granted "auteur" status to the creators of paintings but not to mechanical, technological, or scientific illustrators. In so readily adopting the guise of mere illustrators, as Molly Nesbit has pointed out, both demonstrated that "authorial distinction was artificial," that there was nothing necessarily novel (the requirement for receiving a patent) or necessarily "original" (the requirement for copyright) in their work.[58] But simultaneously both revealed the latent originality and novelty of the mechanical commonplace.

Likewise, as Dickran Tashjian has pointed out in *Skyscraper Primitives*, "straight" photography, as practiced by Stieglitz, Strand, and Sheeler, was "anti-artistic" and vernacular in orientation. Writing in *Camera Work* in 1913, Marius de Zayas claimed that though "the Human Intellect has completed the circle of Art . . . photography escapes through the tangent of the circle. . . . Photography is not Art. It is not even an art. Art is the expression of the conception of an idea. Photography is the plastic verification of a fact."[59] For Duchamp, photography mattered because it was *not* painting. "You know exactly what I think of photography," he replied to a 1922 symposium on the question "Can a Photograph Have the Significance of Art?": "I would like to see it make people despise painting until something else will make photography unbearable."[60]

Still, there was a formal imperative to the enterprise of "straight" photography. As De Zayas put it, "The photographer—the true photographer—is he who has become able, through a state of perfect consciousness, to possess a clear view of things as to enable him to understand and feel the beauty of the reality of Form."[61] And it is

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through the binoculars—the precision optics—of this formal imperative that the history of modernist American photography has been read, so that cubism has come to be regarded as its major art historical source and antecedent. This point of view has been summed up by David Cass in his Foreword to the important exhibition catalog *Cubism and American Photography, 1910–1930*:

> After 1910 certain American photographers coming out of the pictorial tradition of artistic photography became aware of the artistic explorations in other media occurring in Europe in the early twentieth century. Their introduction to modern movements, especially Cubism, led to dissatisfaction with the pictorialist aesthetic or manipulation and soft focus, which they now thought old fashioned in appearance and inimical to the real expressive potential of photography. Seeking to investigate the unique qualities of their own medium, they first felt a necessity to study the achievements of the other plastic arts. Certain premises of Cubism determined its dominant influence on photography: the emphasis upon the object in its most reduced structural form; the differentiation of materials and surface textures of objects; and the fascination with the paradox of representing three dimensions on a two-dimensional surface.[62]

Without denying the validity of Cass's claim—cubism certainly was a major, and very likely dominant, aesthetic impetus to the development of "straight" photography—it misrepresents the impact of cubism in at least two important ways. In the first place, as interested as cubism was in depicting objects in their most reduced structural form and in emphasizing their materials and surface textures, it preeminently depicted, especially in collage, the most *commonplace* and *banal* objects—tables, chairs, coffee cups, pipes, newspapers—the leavings, in short, of a morning sitting idly in the café. Secondly, rather than originating an aesthetic position that "straight" photographers sought to follow and emulate, cubism sanctioned as modern a vernacular aesthetic that by 1910 was long established as a predominantly American idiom.

Sheeler's work is particularly instructive on this score. A painting like *Bucks County Barn* (Figure 4), painted in 1918 but based on a series of drawings that Sheeler had begun in Bucks County in 1917, almost automatically elicits the label "cubist." It certainly possesses the elements of which Cass speaks—reduced structural form, emphasis on surface textures, and a fascination with representing the three-dimensional object on a two-dimensional surface. Here is the *Cubism and American Photography* account of Sheeler's photographic work in the years 1914–17, after he had moved, with his friend the photographer and

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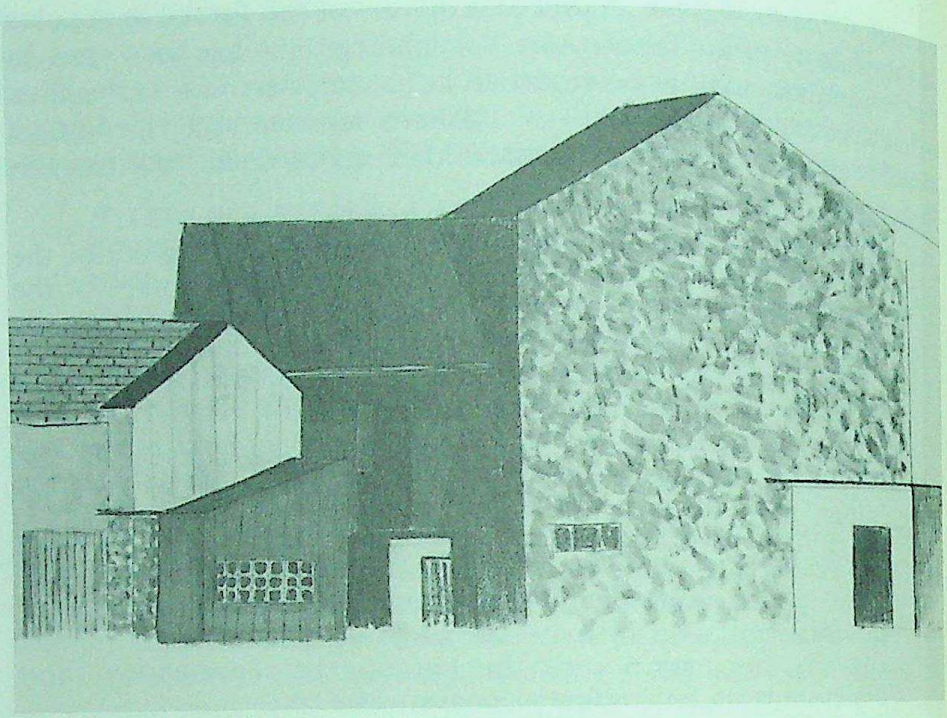

Figure 4. Charles Sheeler, *Bucks County Barn*, 1918. Gouache and conte crayon, 16⅛ × 22⅛ in. Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio. Gift of Ferdinand Howald.

painter Morton Schamberg, into a Quaker house built in 1768 at the edge of Doylestown, Bucks County, Pennsylvania:

> Starting in 1914 Sheeler commenced a photographic series of the interior of the Doylestown weekend house that he shared with Schamberg. During this period when Sheeler was involved with this series (1914–17), his painting style was heavily influenced by European modern art, especially Cubism. . . . [He] began to see the sense of order and formal structure [in Cubism]. . . . His most famous photograph, *White Barn, Bucks County, Pennsylvania* . . . when seen in relation to the 1917 drawing and the 1918 watercolor for which it served as the prototype, reveals Sheeler's adaptation of Cubism. All three works are examples of his interest in structurally pure, quintessentially American forms. While the drawing and watercolor show an entire barn which is simplified and abstracted, Sheeler's photograph is limited to the side of a barn seen in greater detail. In each case, these devices emphasize the clarity of the barn and its inherent qualities. . . . At the least, Sheeler's analytic turn of mind was totally in sympathy with the American understanding of the new art as geometric and structural. . . . The Doylestown photographs are energized

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> by the tension between old and new. Their subject—the interior of an old American house [and Bucks County barns]—could have lent itself to a pictorialist treatment of the picturesque; yet with Sheeler's vision, the forms seem modern in their simplicity, and the photographic style of sharpness and detail seems analytical [like Analytical Cubism], not self-conscious and painterly.[63]

This sense of cubism's connection to the Doylestown work was felt even at the time. Henry McBride, in a review of Sheeler's 1920 exhibition at De Zayas' New York gallery, put it this way: "The artist may win some applause from totally uninstructed persons, who will see that Mr. Sheeler's barns are genuine Bucks county barns in spite of something in the work that the instructed will call 'cubism.'"[64] But McBride is not quite calling the painting "cubist" here. It appeals, he says, to eyes unfamiliar with the latest tendencies in the avant-garde, to eyes familiar with "genuine Bucks county barns." To revert to the language of *Cubism and American Photography*, these barns are, whatever cubist elements they possess, above all, "quintessentially American forms," and are *not*, primarily, an "adaptation of cubism."

To put it bluntly, Sheeler's depictions of Bucks County barns have much more in common with the depictions by Edward Hicks (of *Peaceable Kingdom* fame) of these same Bucks County barns in his folk art landscapes dating from the mid-nineteenth century than they do with cubism (Figure 5). The same emphasis on structural simplicity, textural surface, and especially two-dimensionality is at work in both, however naive these elements might seem in the Hicks. In an article on "Charles Sheeler in Doylestown and the Image of Rural Architecture," Karen Davies has outlined Sheeler's friendship with Henry Chapman Mercer, a native of Doylestown, and a passionate student of American material culture, particularly Bucks County architecture.[65] It was Mercer, in fact, who helped Sheeler secure his lease on the Doylestown house. Though there is no record of Sheeler's ever having seen the painting, we do know that the *Cornell Farm* remained in the Bucks County collection of Mr. and Mrs. J. Stanley Lee of Newtown, Pennsylvania, until purchased by Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch for their famous collection of American primitive painting, and if anyone besides the owner had known of the work, it was Mercer.[66] Though nowhere nearly at the scale of his friend Mercer, Sheeler too began to collect Bucks County artifacts, especially of Shaker origin. His interest in folk art was sufficiently appreciated that in 1924 he was asked to install the exhibition and photograph the works repro-

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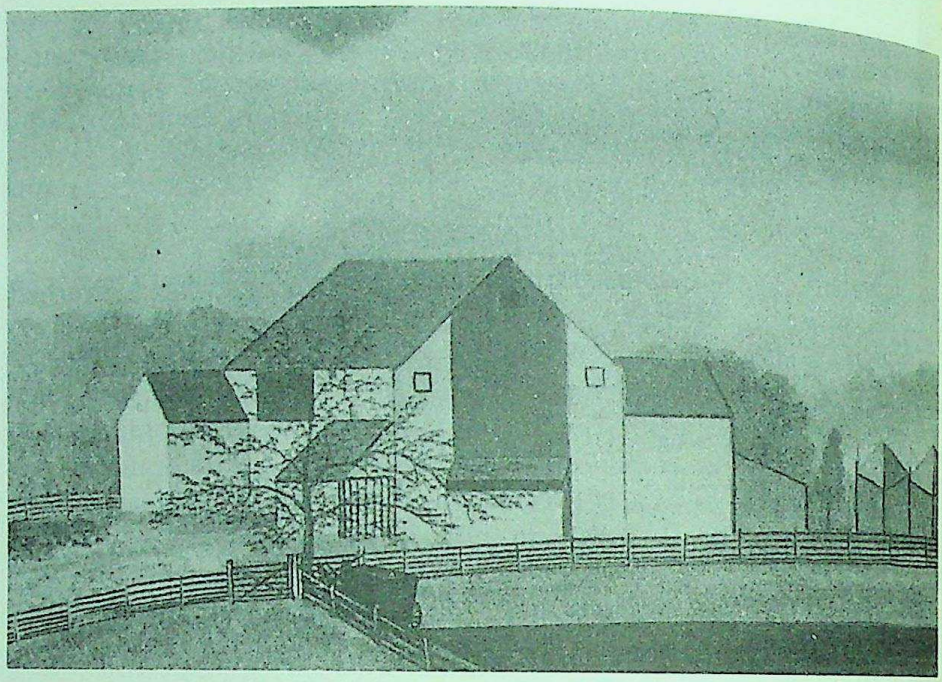

Figure 5. Edward Hicks, *The Cornell Farm* (detail), 1848. National Gallery of Art, Washington. Gift of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch.

duced in the eight-page pamphlet documenting the "Exhibition of Early American Art" at the Whitney Studio Club.[67] At least one of the paintings shown at this exhibition was from his own collection, and by the time he died he owned eleven folk paintings.[68] As Carol Troyen has put it in the catalog to the Boston Museum's 1987 *Charles Sheeler* exhibition:

> Sheeler's preference for these objects was no doubt an outgrowth of his rejection of nineteenth-century taste, especially as espoused by the School of Industrial Art. There the notion of beauty was bound up with complexity of line, lush materials, and especially with ornament. Vernacular pieces and works such as those the Shakers produced, which were undecorated and thus believed to show few signs of handcraftmanship, were found homely and uninteresting. But Sheeler recognized the elegance of these plain, humble forms as well as the high quality of their materials and craftmanship. He found the Shaker aesthetic to be in sympathy with modern design: "In some [Shaker] cabinet work [is] the anticipation, by a hundred years or more, of the tendencies of some of our contemporary designers toward economy and what we call functional in design."[69]

In his classic 1941 article, "Art in America," John C. Kouwenhoven first

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argued for the centrality of this same vernacular to the history of modern design, and he later developed this argument in his essay "Democracy, Machines, and Vernacular Design."[70] For Kouwenhoven, in America, "the idea of democracy, what might be called the democratic impulse, and the technology of manufactured power quite suddenly collaborated to introduce unprecedented psychological and physical elements into man's environment, elements for which it was necessary to find appropriate and satisfying forms. The innumerable, often anonymous acts of arranging, patterning, and designing that went into the creation of those forms constitute the vernacular as I see it."[71] Tracing the development of a "rectangular abstraction" in first early nineteenth-century Shaker architecture, then American railroad cabs of the 1850s, then to the architecture of Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright in Chicago, and through Wright to Mondrian and the Dutch de Stijl, and finally through Mondrian to the architecture of Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, Kouwenhoven demonstrates that "twentieth-century architecture is based upon a scheme of forms gradually evolved in the vernacular."[72]

It seems to me that Williams found this same vernacular imperative in the plain and humble forms of American speech. This is, in fact, what he records in the "Details" that proliferate in the abortive 1941 plan "For the Poem *Paterson*" (*CP2*, pp. 14, 17, 19, 20, 24). What American speech lacked, however, that the American visual vernacular—its barns, skyscrapers, and machines—did not, was apparent formal order and simplicity. Williams sensed it was there, he simply could not find a way to get it on the page convincingly, as elegantly as Sheeler could transcribe a barn.

Yet, as the poem "Fine Work with Pitch and Copper" indicates, Williams' model for revealing the order of the American idiom in the poem was architectural. The poem is "really about my struggle with verse," Williams told Edith Heal (*IWWP*, p. 57). On a flat roof lie "sacks / of sifted stones stacked / regularly by twos" (*CP1*, p. 405). These sacks will be opened and strewn across the roof after the copper has been put in place and the roof sealed with pitch.

> The copper in eight
> foot strips has been
> beaten lengthwise
>
> down the center at right
> angles and lies ready
> to edge the coping

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> One still chewing
> picks up a copper strip
> and runs his eye along it
> (*CP1*, pp. 405–06)

Williams is saying a lot about his prosody here (among other things, if the copper strips are similar to poetic lines, then it is the *eye* that runs along its length), but the most important analogy is also the most fundamental one—a poem is like a house. The analogy, in fact, had been forwarded by Le Corbusier in *Towards a New Architecture:* "When the time does arrive for building this house, it is not the mason's nor the craftsman's moment, but that moment in which every man makes *one* poem, at any rate in his life. And so, in our towns and their outskirts, we have had during the last forty years not so much houses as *poems*."[73] At the time Williams was writing this poem, he had turned his attention to modern architecture ("The Basis of Faith in Art," the essay in which he discusses Le Corbusier with his architect brother, was written not long after), and the house Williams describes in the poem, with its flat roof, is decidedly modern (only old-fashioned houses, Le Corbusier would write, require "pointed roofs, dormers and mansards").[74] Both house and poem are products of the machine age. Not only is the house "a machine for living in" for Le Corbusier, as for Williams the poem is "a machine made of words," but the house is expressly, for Le Corbusier, "like a motor-car." "Citrohan," he named one model he reprinted in *Towards a New Architecture*, "not to say Citroën."

But Le Corbusier's book lies behind the poem, and the thrust of Williams' developing poetic, in an even more important way. Throughout *Towards a New Architecture*, Le Corbusier insists on the important of *measure* to architecture. In a discussion of primitive temples, he writes:

> Note in these plans that they are governed by elementary mathematical calculation. They are the product of measurement. . . . In order to construct well and distribute his efforts to advantage, to obtain solidity and utility in the work, [the builder] has taken measures, he has adopted a unit of measurement, *he has regulated his work*, he has brought in order. . . . In order to get his measurement he has taken his pace, his foot, his elbow or his finger. By imposing the order of his foot or his arm, he has created a unit which regulates the whole work; and this work is on his own scale, to his own proportion, comfortable for him, *to his measure*.[75]

"Fine Work in Pitch and Copper" is about building to just such a measure, its "regularly" piled sacks of stone and eight-foot strips of

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copper, regulating the whole work. But it is of limited application. What Williams needed to discover was a unit of measurement—what Le Corbusier calls a "regulating line"[76]—capable of ordering the whole American idiom. On a manuscript page dating from January 1939 containing a "Detail" that Williams would later include in his "For the Poem *Paterson*" (*CP2*, pp. 20–21), he would note: "This is the sort of thing, in its essential poetic nature, it's [sic] rhythmic make up (analyzed) [of which] the poetry I want to write is made. The reason I haven't gone on with Paterson is that I am not able to—as yet, if ever I shall be. It must be made up of such *speech* (analyzed)."[77] In the so-called "variable foot," Williams would discover the new unit of measurement he was looking for, a line after Le Corbusier's own, consonant with the machine age, but fashioned "to his own proportion, comfortable for him, *to his measure*."[78]

[1] Cited in Paul Mariani, *William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), p. 337.

[2] Letter to Norman MacLeod, 4 Sept., 1935, cited in Mariani, *William Carlos Williams*, pp. 271–72.

[3] Letter dated 5 Feb. 1937, quoted in Mariani, *William Carlos Williams*, p. 400.

[4] Quoted in Mariani, *William Carlos Williams*, p. 263.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] William Carlos Williams, "Poetry," *Columbia Review*, 19 (Nov. 1937), 3.

[7] William Carlos Williams, "Belly Music," *Others*, 5 (July 1919), 26.

[8] Picabia's statement can be found in "French Artists Spur on an American Art," New York *Tribune*, Oct. 24, 1911, IV, 2. The Picabia machine drawings first appeared in *291*, 5–6 (July–Aug., 1915). *Fantaisie* appeared later in the Dec.–Jan. 1915–16 number. The Picabia number of the *Little Review* was 8 (Spring–Summer 1922).

[9] Letter from WCW to the *Little Review*, 9 (Autumn 1922), 59–60.

[10] On Williams' sense of rivalry with Duchamp, see my "Ready-mades and Other Measures: The Poetics of Marcel Duchamp and William Carlos Williams," *Journal of Modern Literature*, 8 (1980), 3–22. The letter to Riordan is dated 26 Jan. 1926 and is cited in Mariani, *William Carlos Williams*, p. 251. In praising Lozowick, Williams was referring to three reproductions—*Chicago*, *New York*, and *Seattle*—which had appeared in the gravure picture section of the Sunday New York *Herald Tribune*, Jan. 24, 1926, p. 3, apparently in reference to Lozowick's exhibition at J. B. Neumann's New Art Circle, Jan. 14–Feb. 4, 1926. Lithographs by Lozowick had appeared with some regularity in the *Herald Tribune* since late 1924. *New York* accompanied a review by Fiske Kimball of Lewis Mumford's *Sticks and Stones: A Study of American Architecture and Civilization* ("A Machine Age," Sunday New York *Herald Tribune Books*, Oct. 26, 1924, p. 3). *Oklahoma*, a depiction of oil derricks, illustrated William A. Drake's review of the 1924 German art annual, *Jahrbuch der Jungen Kunst*, in which Lozowick had been

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the only American to be represented ("Books Abroad," Sunday New York *Herald Tribune Books*, Nov. 23, 1924, p. 7). *Seattle*, along with *Pittsburgh*, two drawings, and the cover design for the catalog of the exhibition "Modern Russian Art," organized by Lozowick for the Société Anonyme in 1925, illustrated Drake's review of the catalog ("Russia's New Art," Sunday New York *Herald Tribune Books*, July 26, 1925, p. 4, with illustrations on pp. 1, 3, and 5). So far as I know, none of the literature on Lozowick mentions these reproductions, which Williams almost certainly knew.

[11] Eugene Jolas and Elliot Paul, "A Review," *transition*, 12 (Mar. 1928), 139, 142.

[12] Eugene Jolas, "The Industrial Mythos," *transition*, 18 (Nov. 1929), 123.

[13] *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 130.

[14] Louis Zukofsky, "American Poetry 1920–1930," *Symposium* (Jan. 1931), 81.

[15] For descriptions of these works, see Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Abrams, 1970), esp. pp. 51–53, 146, 176–81, 482–83, and 491–93.

[16] Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even: A Typographic Version by Richard Hamilton of The Green Box*, trans. George Heard Hamilton (New York: Jaap Rietman, 1976), n.p. I have translated Duchamp's "ironisme" here to "the spirit of irony," in order to avoid the confusing word "ironism" which Hamilton employs.

[17] Harriet and Sidney Janis, "Marcel Duchamp, Anti-Artist," *View*, Ser. V, no. 1 (Mar. 1945), 23–24.

[18] James Guimond, *The Art of William Carlos Williams: A Discovery and Possession of America* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1968), p. 51.

[19] Karal Ann Marling, "My Egypt: The Irony of the American Dream," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 15 (Spring 1980), 26–39.

[20] The publishing history of these photographs can be found in Gladys C. Fabre, "The Modernist Spirit in Figurative Painting: From Modernist Iconography to a Modernist Conception of the Work of Art," in *Léger and the Modern Spirit* (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1982), pp. 153–54.

[21] Walter Gropius had made the connection between silos and Egyptian pyramids as early as 1913 when he had written, "American grain silos . . . can bear comparison in their overwhelming monumental powers with the buildings of Ancient Egypt." See Walter Gropius, "Die Entwicklung moderner Industriebaukunst," *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Werkbundes*, 1913, p. 17. The illustrations precede the article. When these photographs appeared in the first issue of *L'Esprit nouveau* in 1920, Le Corbusier and Amédée Ozenfant, the editors, modified them considerably, retouching them to make the lines simpler and cleaner. Two of the originals and two examples of the retouched photographs are reproduced in Stanislaus von Moos, *Le Corbusier: Elements of a Synthesis* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1979), plates 35a and b, and 36a and b.

[22] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (New York: Praeger, 1927), pp. 31–33.

[23] Barbara Haskell, *Charles Demuth* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1987), p. 194.

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[24] Just how strongly Demuth's sense of place is dependent upon Lancaster is documented in Betsy Fahlman, "Charles Demuth's Paintings of Lancaster Architecture: New Discoveries and Observations," *Arts*, 61 (Mar. 1987), 24–29.

[25] For a full account of the machine aesthetic in American culture, see Richard Guy Wilson, Dianne H. Pilgrim, and Dickran Tashjian, *The Machine Age in America 1918–1941* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1986).

[26] Guillaume Apollinaire, "Aesthetic Meditations," *Little Review*, 9 (Winter 1922), 50–51.

[27] Quoted in *Fernand Léger, 1881–1955*, catalog of an exhibition June–October 1956 (Paris: Musée des Arts Decoratifs, 1956), p. 162.

[28] Fernand Léger, "The Esthetics of the Machine: The Manufactured Object, The Artisan and the Artist," *Little Review*, 9 (Spring 1923), 46.

[29] Jane Heap, "The Constructivists," *Little Review*, 10 (Spring 1924), 57.

[30] Joseph Freeman, Joshua Kunitz, and Louis Lozowick, *Voices of October: Art and Literature in Soviet Russia* (New York: Vanguard, 1930), pp. 273–74. A relatively complete record of the constructivist influence on American art can be found in Joan Marter, "Constructivism in America: The 1930s," *Arts*, 56 (June 1982), 73–80. Lozowick's interest in the constructivists is outlined in Barbara Zabel, "The Precisionist-Constructivist Nexus: Louis Lozowick in Berlin," *Arts*, 56 (May 1981), 123–27.

[31] Robert Allerton Parker, "The Classical Vision of Charles Sheeler," *International Studio*, 84 (May 1926), 68.

[32] See Mike Weaver, *William Carlos Williams: The American Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 47–48. Riordan's language is uncannily similar to Parker's review of Sheeler.

[33] Zabel, "The Precisionist-Constructivist Nexus," pp. 123–27.

[34] Amédée Ozenfant and Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier), "Le Formation de l'optique moderne," *L'Esprit nouveau*, No. 21, 1923.

[35] For a discussion of the similarity between Lozowick's *Machine Ornaments* and Léger's work, see Tashjian, *The Machine Age in America*, pp. 233–37.

[36] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, p. 121.

[37] Williams' copy of *La Peinture moderne* (Paris: Cres, 1927) is in the collection of his Personal Library at Fairleigh Dickinson University. Le Corbusier's phrase can be found in *Towards a New Architecture*, pp. 10, 100.

[38] See Zabel, "The Precisionist-Constructivist Nexus," p. 123.

[39] Louis Lozowick, "The Americanization of Art," *Machine Age Exposition*, May 16–May 28, 1927 (New York: Little Review, 1927), 18–19.

[40] Quoted in Constance Rourke, *Charles Sheeler* (New York: Harcourt, 1938), p. 143.

[41] Charles Sheeler, "Notes on an Exhibition of Greek Art" (1925), reprinted in *Charles Sheeler* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1968), pp. 93–94.

[42] Charles Sheeler, "A Brief Note on the Exhibition," *Charles Sheeler: Paintings, Drawings, Photographs* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1939), p. 11. This is the catalog for which Williams wrote the introduction.

[43] Jolas, "The Industrial Mythos," p. 123.

[44] Rick Stewart has argued that it is the New Objectivity "that most closely corresponds to the American Precisionist style"; see "Charles Sheeler, William Carlos Williams, and Precisionism: A Redefinition," *Arts*, 58 (Nov. 1983),

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100–13. Anyone who reads Stewart's piece will see that we disagree on many counts, but Stewart's is by far the most comprehensive and informed essay on the subject, and I have learned much from it, especially from its scope.

[45] Samuel M. Kootz, "Ford Plant Photos of Charles Sheeler," *Creative Art*, 8 (Apr. 1931), 265.

[46] Louis Zukofsky, "Program: 'Objectivists' 1931," *Poetry*, 37 (Feb. 1931), p. 268.

[47] Paul Strand, "Photography," *Seven Arts* (Aug. 1917), in *Photographers on Photography*, ed. Nathan Lyons (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 136.

[48] Sheeler, "A Brief Note," p. 11.

[49] Henry Sayre, *The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1983), pp. 71–74.

[50] Lisa Steinman, *Made in America: Science, Technology, and American Modernist Poets* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1987), p. 98.

[51] An excellent summary of Williams' "characteristic" descriptive mode during the period can be found in Robert von Hallberg, "The Politics of Description: W. C. Williams in the 'Thirties," *ELH*, 45 (1978), 131–51.

[52] Zukofsky's editing procedures have been described by Neil Baldwin in his "Zukofsky, Williams and *The Wedge*: Toward a Dynamic Convergence," in *Louis Zukofsky: Man and Poet*, ed. Carroll F. Terrell (Orono, Me.: National Poetry Foundation, 1979), pp. 129–42.

[53] Von Hallberg, "The Politics of Description," p. 145.

[54] Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 148.

[55] See Walter Pach, *Queer Thing, Painting* (New York: Harper, 1938), p. 163.

[56] Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (New York: Viking, 1971), p. 38.

[57] *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

[58] Molly Nesbit, "What Was an Author?," *Everyday Life, Yale French Studies*, 73 (1987), 250.

[59] Marius de Zayas, "Photography," *Camera Work*, No. 41 (Jan. 1913), 17. Quoted in Dickran Tashjian's chapter on "*Camera Work* and the Anti-Art of Photography," in *Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde, 1910–1925* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1975). p. 26.

[60] "Can a Photograph Have the Significance of Art?," *Manuscripts* (Dec. 1922), p. 2.

[61] De Zayas, "Photography," p. 20.

[62] David B. Cass, "Foreword," in John Pultz and Catherine B. Scallen, *Cubism and American Photography, 1910–1930* (Williamstown, Mass.: Clark Art Institute, 1981), p. vi.

[63] *Ibid.*, pp. 27–29.

[64] Henry McBride, "Work of Charles Sheeler Attracts Attention," *Sun and New York Herald*, Feb. 22, 1920, p. 7. The passage is quoted in the analysis of the painting in Carol Troyen and Erica E. Hirshler, *Charles Sheeler: Paintings and Drawings* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1987), p. 72.

[65] Karen Davies, "Charles Sheeler and the Image of Rural Architecture," *Arts*, 59 (Mar. 1985), 135–39. Davies points out that Mercer's collection was so

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vast that in 1916 he donated over 30,000 preindustrial tools and other vernacular artifacts to the Bucks County Historical Society.

[66] The only record of the painting's exhibit before the 1950s is at the Bucks County Bi-Centennial Celebration in Doylestown in 1882. Of perhaps equal interest is Hicks's *Leedom Farm* of 1849 which, though less simplified and two-dimensional, depicts a fieldstone barn of a texture similar to the one depicted by Sheeler. It is worth noting that by the early 1930s the *Arts Digest* would write: "American folk art is rapidly coming into its own. . . . Fernand Léger, French painter, on his recent visit to the United States, spoke of Edward Hicks as a more important man in the history of art than the French Rousseau, and referred to his 'The Peaceable Kingdom' as the greatest painting he saw in this country" ("Hicks Called Greatest in America by Léger," *Arts Digest*, 6 [Dec. 15, 1931], 13).

[67] *Charles Sheeler: Paintings and Drawings*, p. 13, 21.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 46, *n.* 30.

[69] *Ibid.*, p. 22. The quotation from Sheeler comes from the Sheeler Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[70] John A. Kouwenhoven, "Democracy, Machines, and Vernacular Design," in *Half a Truth Is Better than None: Some Unsystematic Conjectures about Art, Disorder, and American Experience* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 75–105. "Art in America" was first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in August 1941 and is reprinted in Kouwenhoven's *The Arts in Modern American Civilization* (New York: Norton, 1967), pp. 1–12.

[71] Kouwenhoven, "Democracy, Machines, and Vernacular Design," p. 80.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 100.

[73] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, p. 245. Le Corbusier's influence on American aesthetic thinking was extensive; for a summary see Jeffrey L. Meikle, *Twentieth Century Limited: Industrial Design in America, 1925–1939* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 29–32.

[74] *Ibid.*, p. 213.

[75] *Ibid.*, pp. 66–68.

[76] *Ibid.*, p. 71. The chapter on measure in *Towards a New Architecture* is called, in fact, "Regulating Lines."

[77] Quoted in Mariani, *William Carlos Williams*, p. 420.

[78] An early version of this essay was delivered to the session on Williams at the 1985 convention of the Modern Language Association in Chicago under the title "After *The Descent of Winter*: Objectivism, Precisionism, and the Aesthetics of the Machine." While I had always meant to prepare the paper for publication, it fell victim to other projects. I am grateful to Robert Franciosi and *Twentieth Century Literature* for prompting me to take it up again. This revision has the particular advantage of benefiting from Lisa Steinman's discussion of the original paper in her book *Made in America: Science, Technology, and American Modernist Poets*. Very few of us ever have the opportunity to rethink a project in the light of so insightful a study as Steinman's. The change in title has been, at least in part, prompted by Steinman's argument, and represents a reconsideration of the aesthetic position of not only Williams' poetry but of objectivism and precisionism as well. It also reflects my own growing interest in the vernacular as a theoretical problem, one which I think lies at the heart of what I take to be the most interesting American art and literature in this century but which

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American formalist criticism has, for ideological reasons, by and large ignored. I have discussed the critical fate of the idea of the vernacular—which in art historical circles has most usually been labeled (and dismissed) as "kitsch"—at some length in my book *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989), where I have also attempted to define its centrality to contemporary performance-oriented artforms.

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The Fading Beautiful Thing of *Paterson*

Nancy K. Barry

In June of 1946, when New Directions published Book One of *Paterson*, William Carlos Williams was almost sixty-three years old, two years away from his first heart attack. It had been nineteen years since the eighty-five line poem "Paterson" was published in the *Dial*, and throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, his task at "maneuvering" this "mass of material" had proven formidable and frustrating. As Paul Mariani and others have suggested,[1] we can hardly underestimate the importance of the epic for Williams: it would become his answer to Eliot, a "big, serious portrait of my time" (*I*, p. 238). Not only would *Paterson* represent "a mode of modern verse . . . as simple as speech itself,"[2] it would gather together all of his creative impulses and energies. As early as 1927, he knew: "All that I am doing . . . will go in it. . . . Patterson [sic] is really—part of it."[3] But the journey toward bringing the *Paterson* material into existence as a book was not an easy one for Williams. The manuscripts and drafts of the poem, like his correspondence with James Laughlin, his editor at New Directions, all suggest a divided and contradictory impulse in his pursuit of the long poem. For reasons that are more historical than literary or stylistic, based more on physical and biographical evidence than on interpretive details, the "beautiful thing" of *Paterson* existed foremost for Williams as an accumulation of texts: the *Dial* poem of 1926; the "Beautiful Thing" lyric published as "Patterson: Episode 17" in 1937; "Paterson: The Falls," published in the *Wedge* in 1944; a poem he merely envisioned as an "Introduction" in 1942; the four-book plan announced in 1946, and then added to in 1958 and the early 1960s. His "dream of the whole poem" faded further and further from his imagination at the same moment it moved closer toward the language and structure of its published form. Throughout the writing of *Paterson*, there were

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strenuous pulls within Williams not to complete the poem, to keep the text safe within the confines of his "plans" and draft pages, to resist the fall into a tangled web of "finished" language, demarcated by history and layered with critical commentary and response.

At the heart of his conception of the epic lies a contradiction between Williams' overall conception of the material and the fragmented, sporadic fits and spurts of extended composition. As a text, *Paterson* was both "fully formed" and "newly sprung," "all worked out in one stroke" and yet utterly spontaneous and flexible in design. Even though he boasted to Henry Wells in 1955 that he "conceived the whole of *Paterson* at one stroke and wrote it down—as it appears at the beginning of the poem" (*SL*, p. 333), *Paterson* was more truly an ongoing struggle for the poet, so much so that he waited for critical reviews to appear on Book One to lead him in a direction for the next volumes. His comment to Wells is reminiscent of his proclamation at the beginning of *The Great American Novel,* "Everything exists from the beginning" (*I*, p. 158), and throughout his career, Williams persistently valorized the moment of origin as antecedent to language, undefiled by words and the "trick of history." However, even though Williams sometimes managed to obscure linguistically the origin of "everything," poems brought to an editor's desk needed to begin somewhere, and his creative methods during those years when he was struggling to write *Paterson* demonstrated a large amount of anxiety and ambivalence about where and how to begin the poem.

The comments Williams made on the biography of his poem—before, during and after its publication between 1946 and 1958—were frequently deceptive and contradictory. In the midst of composing the poem (or at least in shaping it into form for publication), Williams sometimes seemed to struggle against his own strategies and procedures. For one thing, the 1930s and early 1940s were an era of nonpoetic activity for Williams, and such an extended productivity in fiction increased his anxiety about writing poems again: "I want to have a go at verse again," he wrote in 1941. "I haven't written any for years, it seems, and I know I shall never again write as I have written in the past. I want to know what's in there. I'm curious. Something has happened within me, perhaps a final catharsis of the whole material of verse. But if I'm empty at last I want to prove it."[4]

In a fit of frustration, he complains:

> That God damned and I mean God damned poem *Paterson* has me down. I am burned up to do it but don't quite know how. I write and destroy, write and destroy. It's all shaped up in outline

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> and intent, the body of the thinking is finished but the technique, the manner and the method are unresolvable to date. I flounder and flunk. . . . But it's got to be born, it's got to be pushed out of me somehow and in some perfect form. But that form, involving the future and the past is—to my weak powers almost too much. I won't acknowledge I haven't the stuff for it though at times my fears are devastating. (27 Dec. 1943)

Even when the poem was almost ready to send out to Laughlin, in February of 1945, Williams admitted that "it frightens me a bit and, as always, I don't think it's real; I wonder if it's really there—among those pages of words" (4 Feb. 1945).

Throughout his letters, he heralded the project of the long poem at the same moment he found himself unable to pursue it. In fact, his fears about recovering the lyric impulse were compounded by his ambivalence toward starting the poem in the first place. In 1936, Williams explained to Ezra Pound that "the long poem" was something he has "always wanted to do," yet at the same time he admitted that he couldn't "get at that" (*SL*, p. 163). A few weeks later, Norman Pearson received a confession of sorts: "At the moment I can't write a thing. I haven't written anything to speak of for almost a year" (*SL*, p. 172). Two years later, he confessed to Laughlin, " 'Paterson,' I know, is crying to be written," but then found himself unable to start or continue work in any consistent fashion: "I want to work at it but I shy off whenever I set down to work. It's maddening, but I have the hardest time to make myself stick to it" (*SL*, p. 214). From the start, *Paterson* was a poem "crying to be written" by a poet who feared he might be "empty" of the "whole material of verse."

This ambivalence about what constitutes the "whole" poem reveals much about Williams' conception of *Paterson*. Throughout the early 1940s, he projected both form and finality onto a poem that he was somewhat unable to write. In June of 1942, he proclaimed to Laughlin, "I've been driving ahead full speed to get all requests and letters out of the way *for the summer* so as to be able to drive ahead on the poem" (23 June 1942). But the procrastination continued, and he finally explained its source in a letter to Horace Gregory in 1945:

> All this fall I have wanted to get to the "Paterson" poem again and as before I always find a dozen reasons for doing nothing about it. I see the mass of material I have collected and that is enough. I shy away and write something else. The thing is the problems involved require too much work for the time I have at my disposal. . . . I know it is a cowardly attitude of mind but I get knocked out every time I begin. Too much is involved. Just

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> yesterday I learned one of the causes of my inability to proceed: I MUST BEGIN COMPOSING AGAIN. I thought all I had to do was to arrange the material but that's ridiculous. Much that I have collected is antique now. The old approach is outdated, and I shall have to work like a fiend to make myself new again. (*SL*, pp. 234–35)

Even by 1945, Williams still felt that he would never write "as I did in the past," and thus the "finishing" of *Paterson* required that he "remake" himself and ignore the material he had been gathering. Throughout the completion of *Paterson*, Williams' comments revealed an inherent contradiction in his method and plan for the poem. The poem was at once fully formed, and utterly incomplete. In June of 1942, he explained to Laughlin that he must give "strict attention to [*Paterson*] now if ever it is to be finished—as much as it will ever be finished—the Introduction I mean" (23 June 1942). Such comments suggest that he persistently imagined a "finished" work for a text in which he had only completed the "introduction." As a project, *Paterson* was so "fully formed" in Williams' imagination that the process of writing and publishing the poem seemed like an act of "dismembering" to him, a fall into language and form that made the "dream of the whole poem" a literal fact, tangled with publisher's deadlines, the faint praise of critics, and the necessity for "completing" a poem he would rather simply accumulate in the friendly disorder of his own imagination, rather than the finished design of a published artifact.

One reason, perhaps, for Williams' anxiety about working on the poem and bringing it toward publication relates to his uncertainty about what constituted the poem in the first place. Between 1920 and 1940, *Paterson* existed for Williams as an accumulating artifact. In large manila envelopes, labeled for each of the four books of the poem, he would compile manuscript pages, prescription blanks with images or bits of verse scrawled beneath the logo, calendar pages, and other fragments. On each of the envelopes, Williams pasted a typed "outline" sheet for the book's contents and form.[5] These pages reveal how Williams' conception of *Paterson* helped him to accumulate the "particulars" for each one of the poem's books. As Neil Baldwin notes, though the materials from individual envelopes "interpenetrated and overlapped," the system was a "reassuring organizational tool" for Williams.[6] Although we shouldn't underestimate the importance of the four-book, skeletal design for *Paterson*, we should also acknowledge that such a plan was more idealized than it was "reassuring." In addition, the fluid progress of fragments and pieces among the four books suggests

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that we should read the four-part structure as a necessary foundation or framework, to which Williams attached individual bits of lyric poems (the most important of which were composed long before Book One appeared), dramatic exchanges, and fragmentary details. Thus, what was once an overall, initial concept of a four-book poem ultimately became an undifferentiated quantity of material which was neither ordered nor orderly.[7]

Perhaps as early as the publication of "The Wanderer" in 1914, Williams began accumulating and assimilating passages and lyrics toward his "magnum opus." In fact, in draft pages for Book Two, where Mr. Paterson encounters the "female presence" of the "Park and City," Williams lifted two entire pages from "The Strike" section of this early long poem. Such a literal transcription shows that Williams did not in fact renounce the stylistic devices of his early work as he developed the more direct and concrete poetic style of *Paterson*; rather, the "old texts" of Williams' own lyric archive were evoked in order to propel his imaginative energies further. "The Wanderer" is less an early poem than a seminal one, an imagistic and narrative reservoir the poet would draw on throughout his career. Only one stanza survives his long transcription of the 1914 poem into Book Two, but such evidence illustrates how Williams returned to previously written texts in the process of composing *Paterson*. Critics have viewed "The Wanderer" as an example of Williams' early style,[8] partly because the poet himself described it as a "reconstruction from memory of my early Keatsian Endymion imitation" (*IWWP*, p. 26). However, seeing its pages woven into the manuscripts for Book Two, the poem projects both style and form onto the later epic, and suggests that, from the start, *Paterson* existed as a pastiche of "songs sung previously," in some cases, far more previously than we might otherwise think.

The manuscript pages for the first "Paterson" to appear in print are substantially longer than the lines published in the *Dial* in 1927. One draft of the poem is 218 lines long; another, 249. Both are numbered in consecutive pages, and their form seems quite close to the published version of Book One.[9] In fact, when the poem was printed in the *Dial*, it contained a series of ellipses after lines 24, 55, 75, and 85. Apparently, Williams abbreviated the text by removing several stanzas at these points, so any understanding of how much material Williams had actually accumulated by 1927 should begin with a study of these versions, especially since Williams continued to include a large portion of this poem in Book One, right up until the final editing of the page proofs.[10] Essentially, Williams edited out for the *Dial* those portions of

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images, dialogue, and structure that make the poem more fragmentary. Some might argue that Williams simply enlarged the 1927 poem when he began to gather material for *Paterson* during the late 1930s and early 1940s, but the physical evidence of the manuscripts, as well as their style and themes, suggest that by 1927 Williams had accumulated a fairly substantial amount of material toward the later epic.

On a manuscript page containing a note about how to help himself get started with this material, Williams reminds himself that he should "break up the long poem . . . by interpolations of poems" (UB E17).[11] Perhaps the most complicated and intricate "interpolations" of previously written poems into *Paterson* involved Williams' use of the "Beautiful Thing" lyric, published as "Patterson: Episode 17" in 1937, as well as the ninety-three line "Preface" to Book Three, published in *12th St., New York* in 1949. Both these poems reveal how Williams created a new poetic artifact in the midst of copying over previously written, "finished" works. The draft sheets for Book Three show that Williams desired to use the refrain "Beautiful Thing" as a lyric motif to underscore the entire book. Surprisingly, the placement of specific stanzas of the 1937 poem did not seem as important to Williams as the repetition of the refrain "Beautiful Thing" juxtaposed with the newly invented, freshly arranged lines of the poem. Likewise, the ninety-three-line "Preface" contains an overall synopsis of Book Three. It is unified by the repetition of the phrase "So be it," which occurs in forty-five different lines (often repeated two or three times), and the poem is framed by its references to the "sanctuary" of the Library, creating a narrative whereby the fire and flood can be reimagined and reenacted by readers through historical documents. Thus, the "old newspaper files" become a source of poetic reinvention, and the fire which is described is both literal and metaphorical:

> A bronze dog, eyes
> aflame, in a flame filled corridor. A drunkeness
> of flames. So be it. A bottle, mauled
> by the flames, belly-bent with laughter:
> an empurpled face choked blue with laughter—
> yellow, green. So be it. —of drunkeness
> survived, in guffaws of flame. All fire afire.
> So be it. Swallowing the fire and coming
> heads up! Capping the fire. So be it.[12]

In this earlier lyric, the fire is followed immediately by the action of the flood ("Rain / falls and surfeits the river's upper reaches"), and the poem closes with a note of calm reverie on the transformation of history

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into a "stream" which "grows leaden." In composing Book Three, Williams transcribes three portions of this "Preface" into the separate sections of the book. Lines 1 through 33 occur in the opening pages of section one, after the description of the way "Books will give rest sometimes / against / the roar of water falling" (*P*, p. 82); lines 35–37 are quoted after the verses from "Episode 17" (*P*, p. 98); lines 40 through 64 occur in section two, when the speaker describes the metaphysical aspects of destruction, and connects the artifacts to "burnt Sappho's poems, burned by intention" (*P*, pp. 117–18); finally, lines 65 through 93 are transcribed into section three, where Williams details the "sullen, leaden flood" that leads to the poet's own drowning (*P*, pp. 129–30). Throughout these sections, Williams quotes the "Preface" verbatim, with only one change in the reference to "history" in the final stanza. At one point, Williams conceived of this preface as "part one" of Book Three, but then reverted to the meditative lyric "I love the locust tree" as the opening section of the book, and decided to "divide up" the original "preface" in a similar fashion as he did the "Beautiful Thing" lyric.

Throughout the writing of *Paterson*, Williams repeatedly articulated the "whole" poem in abbreviated drafts which contained the "gist" of the entire text. The eighty-five-line "Paterson," the lyric on "Paterson: The Falls," published in the *Wedge* in 1944, the "Preface" to Book Three—all these texts demonstrate that Williams could capsule the overall plot or scheme for his poem with far more energy than he could sustain in composing the long poem. To a certain extent, Williams' capacity to idealize the overall form for *Paterson* represents not so much his resistance to specifying individual parts, but rather, his persistent desire to escape, or transcend, the finite and finalized moment of composition.

Given this type of accumulating design, it shouldn't surprise us that Williams would write a plan sheet for himself with the instructions to use "parts, essential details or expressive details, of relevant poems ALREADY WRITTEN only to be used. . . . Parts only for THIS whole, the Introduction: 1) The Strike; 2) early bit from "Paterson"; 3) Beautiful Thing; 4) Morning and 5) the small bits" (YCAL 189). What is surprising, however, is that such an arrangement of previously written poems would only aggravate Williams' sense about what constituted the "whole" of *Paterson*, or, more specifically, what exactly he referred to in talking about the poem. In 1942, he reminded Laughlin of the project, claiming that "the *final prelude* [emphasis added] to Paterson" will be enough "for a small book" (30 April 1942). Three months later he

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wanted to give "strict attention" to the material, "if ever it is to be finished—as much as it will ever be finished—the Introduction I mean" (23 June 1942). One month later, he wrote another progress report, an explanation that teases us (and perhaps Laughlin too) into seeing the poem fully formed, even though it was really still caught within its introductory stages:

> Working like hell on *Paterson*, it's coming too. I'm limiting myself to an "introduction," a summary of the whole poem which will in all probability not come to an end for another twenty years if I live that long. The Introduction serves all my purposes and will make a book in itself. I'm getting really excited about it. Thrilling material I'm digging up every day you might say. It's a theme for everything I've got and more. Wish I had more. I'm trying my best to have in shape for this fall, hope you'll be able to handle it. You'll see. It'll be a book. (13 July 1942)

It's hard to know exactly what "will be the book" at this point—the introduction? Book One? The "summary of the whole poem"? Three years later, in January of 1945, he was still fudging on what exactly he would be able to publish from the material: "The first part of the Paterson thing is nearing completion. There will be four parts, each of fifty to seventy five pages. It is to be called, *Paterson: Introduction*—but that will be the end of it, just the introduction, life isn't long enough for anything else" (30 Jan. 1945). It's clear from this letter that Williams has committed himself to a four-book poem (in fact he believed that he could finish one book a year), and he even asked Laughlin to help him by contracting for the books ("I believe a dead-line would be a good thing for me at this stage"), so perhaps we should interpret the term "introduction" here as a way of suggesting that *Paterson* was ultimately a project he could start, rather than complete, in his lifetime.

His confusion over what constituted the "introduction" of the poem was paralleled by his indecision about when the material would be ready for publication. Before publishing Book One, Williams wasn't entirely sure when (or how much) of *Paterson* was ready for print. On April 25, 1944, he told Laughlin that he might not want to publish the books of *Paterson* separately: "It's too near finished for that." In fact, Floss wanted Williams to hold back on getting Book One out, until all four parts had been written (7 Sept. 1945), and Williams asked Laughlin about his advice on the matter: "If you think I ought to wait until the four parts are completed, say so. But I'm afraid of that. I got to get going or it may prove too late" (30 Jan. 1945).

It's difficult to assess Williams' progress in composing the poem,

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but he was notorious, throughout its growth, for overestimating it. As early as 1936, he told Ronald Latimer (the editor at the Alcestis Press), that the Paterson material was enough "for another book." When Latimer pressed Williams for the manuscript, after the publication of *Adam & Eve & the City* (1936), Williams was forced to admit: "When I said I had the next script ready I was not speaking the truth," but he promised Latimer that he would "make a sketch of the whole in about fifty pages . . . all the essential elements will be there."[13] Beginning in 1942, Williams assured Laughlin the poem was "nearly finished now," only to admit in December of that year that the work could not be ready. A year later, Williams insisted that *Paterson*, as an "idea," was fully formed in his mind: "It's all shaped up in outline and intent, the body of the thinking is finished but the technique, the manner and the method are unresolvable to date" (27 Dec. 1943). In fact, the "whole" poem for Williams was the same thing as its "introduction," a semantic difference revealing his belief that he could survey the entire four-book poem at a glance; once he actually began to publish Book One, however, his grasp of the overall design might begin to diminish somehow.

At the heart of Williams' extended plans, outlines, and schemes for *Paterson* lies a startling uncertainty about the form and content of the poem. Although Williams made consistent sketches of the "whole" idea of *Paterson*, he still was not entirely sure of even its most rudimentary details, such as the spelling of the poem's title: "Paterson" in 1927; "Patterson" in 1936; "Patterson: Episode 17" in 1937; and in March of 1939, when he sent James Laughlin an eighty-five page typescript on the project, he titled it: "Detail and Parody for the Poem Patterson." (This collection was never published as such, but several lyrics appeared in the 1941 volume *The Broken Span*, again using the title "For the Poem Patterson.") Some might argue that Williams was not responsible for the misspellings, or even that he was an occasionally sloppy speller, but the variant suggests some uncertainty.[14] Granted, an additional "t" in the title of a work isn't sufficient evidence to demonstrate Williams' ambivalence concerning the entire project, but it does indicate that, in the midst of planning and schematizing *Paterson*, Williams was truthfully unsure of its smallest items, or rather, so sure of the "whole" poem that its individual parts and details escaped him.

One final bit of evidence from his correspondence with Laughlin helps us to understand how split the poet was between reworking older materials and composing newly formed, "spontaneous" sections. One year after he announced that *Paterson* was "too near finished" for publication as separate books, he warned Laughlin that he would use

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responses to Book One to help him get going on the other volumes: "And if the critics say something to the point (or even vaguely perceptive) . . . I'll incorporate their findings in the next book of the series" (28 Mar. 1945). Even if the reactions were negative, Williams was ready to put them to use in Book Two, a text which is "already written": "I wish that Paterson thing were out so that I could take my beating, get mad and write Book II in a fit of temper. . . . Book II, I might add, is already written. . . . I'll slash it to hell in that fit of temper if it comes" (26 Sept. 1945). When he did finally see the reviews to Book One, Williams was pleased in some instances to find "a graph . . . of my own mind" to help in the production of the next three books.

Throughout his correspondence with Laughlin, Williams kept insisting that "the next installment" could be ready in six months or a year. In fact, much of the evidence suggests that as each book of the poem reached publication, Williams' pursuit of the material became less complicated, partially because he was using up more of the materials he had been gathering. If we begin "counting" the years toward Book One with the publication of "The Wanderer" in 1914, it took over thirty years for Williams to bring Book One into finished form. In fact, even its publication was delayed substantially by the number of changes Williams required on the page proofs. After the publication of Book One, the period of composing and "arranging" for each of the subsequent volumes was substantially less, aggravated by his first stroke in 1948, which frustrated his abilities considerably.

The challenge for Williams in working with his material was to articulate a structure for the long poem without imposing one. In the midst of making outlines and plan sheets, he would resist as long as possible the delineation of its specific parts. Since the overall shape for *Paterson* existed as a skeletal framework for Williams, in the guise of his imaginative plan for the "whole" poem, the "measured dance" of its five books proved somewhat false to its compositional history, as well as the poet's writing practice. Throughout the writing of *Paterson*, Williams planned for its "absolute coherence" (YCAL 189) by making outlines and lists of what and how its various parts would contribute to the overall form. He made elaborate plans for "the overall plot and structural scheme" (YCAL 189), only to admit that occasionally, his "form" was a vague and superficial category: "Form here is used in the broadest most comprehensive sense, only indefinite because the particulars still wait for the performance" (UB C49). To manage such a contradictory impulse (to outline and organize at the same moment he

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resisted plans and denied their relevance to the "particulars" of the poem) Williams used the drafts of *Paterson* as verbal spheres in which he could compose spontaneously, often reminding himself of his desire to escape both time and space. "Begin in the middle of some trenchant speech," he plans in "Paterson: The Falls." "The old, original end must not be forgot" (UB E30), he claimed in planning Book Four, a remark reminiscent of his description of Zukofsky's poetry, in which he explains that one should read "the end back to the beginning and then finishing" (UB C150). Throughout the draft pages of *Paterson*, Williams imagined that such rhetoric would sustain his dual engagement with the poem's "original" compositional moment, at the same time he achieved some sense of completion and "end." To see *Paterson* in relation to its drafts—the myriad "particulars" Williams composed, arranged, and rearranged for its "performance"—is to discover how elusive an overall form was for the poem and its author. Once we acknowledge how much Williams shifted around and rearranged the individual lines, sections, and books of the poem, we begin to question whether or not we too impose a form on the poem as we describe it critically.

Understanding the complicated genesis of a poem like *Paterson* requires that we recognize Williams' ambivalence concerning the poem's structure. As he arranged the disparate and sometimes incoherent fragments he had been collecting for the poem, Williams relied more on a conception of form than on a specific organizing technique. In 1943, the poet commented on Wallace Stevens' publication, *Parts of a World*, and compared Stevens' use of form to his own design in the drafts of *Paterson*: "If Stevens speaks of *Parts of a World*, this is definitely Parts of a Greater World—a looser, wider world where 'order' is a servant not a master. Order is what is discovered after the fact . . ." (*SL*, p. 214). In describing his uneasiness about Stevens' poetic form, Williams reveals his own search for a workable design for *Paterson*. In 1945, he complained to Norman Macleod about critical responses to his poetry: "My poetry appears to most as formless"; *Paterson* would become his "detailed reply" to such charges. But Williams realizes that it "will not be accepted because of its formlessness, because I have not organized it into some neoclassic *recognizable* context" (*SL*, pp. 238–39). In 1957, he explained: "I knew I wanted to say it [*Paterson*] in *my* form. But I was aware that it wasn't a finished form, yet I knew it was not formless. I had to invent my form, if form it was" (*IWWP*, p. 74).

"Formless form" is the paradox that best explains Williams' conception of *Paterson*'s design and structure, as evidenced by the materials and notes he collected. From the start, he claimed that the

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four-part structure of the poem represented its thematic content: "Part One introduces the elemental character of the place. The Second Part comprises the modern replicas. Three will seek a language to make them vocal, and Four, the river below the falls, will be reminiscent of episodes—all that any one man may achieve in a lifetime" (*P*, Author's note). Ultimately, the actual content of Books One through Four proved measurably different, but his idealizing of the shape of the poem enabled him to grasp it, at least in some skeletal way. Furthermore, conceiving of the poem in four parts allowed Williams to imagine his own poetic process as replicating the cyclical harmony of nature. "I found myself always conceiving my abstract designs as possessing four sides," he explained in a letter to Wells in 1955, "that was natural enough with spring, summer, autumn and winter before me" (*SL*, p. 333). On one outline sheet for *Paterson*, Williams actually aligns each of the four books with its counterpart in the seasons:

I
THE DELINEAMENTS OF THE GIANTS (spring

II
SUNDAY IN THE PARK (summer

III
THE LIBRARY (fall

IV
THE RIVER (winter
(YCAL 195)

Beneath the fourth section on the manuscript above, Williams wrote, "Summer imagined," an indication that he desired the text of *Paterson*, like the regenerative process of "spring and all," to conclude with some new poetic material. Even at the moment when he planned for four books as patterned in sequence as the seasons, he resisted any attempt to close the poem. Williams didn't consciously begin to try out the concept of a fifth book until a manuscript page from Book Four, where he scrawled: "Much here to be used as it stands—perhaps in a 5th book of 'facts'?" (YCAL 189), and he mentioned it later to Laughlin in a letter in 1954, three years after the "completion" of his four-book plan. In publishing Book Five, Williams admitted that "I have been forced to recognize that there can be no end to such a story I have envisioned.... Yet I wanted to keep it whole, as it is to me" (*P*, Author's note). Even in the midst of rearranging, or adding on to, the elemental structure of the poem, Williams insisted that he could "keep it whole."

One key strategy that enabled him to perceive such coherence

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throughout the poem's composition was to write plans, outlines, and schemes for the project. The draft pages of *Paterson* are filled with notes about some organizational feature or form, and Williams spent much creative thought reminding (or convincing) himself how and when to write the poem: "Write *now,* a gist of the books" (UB E1). Another outline sheet, apparently an early one, shows Williams only able to separate his first books into vague categories:

Paterson

Schematic outline:
1. Preliminary —Introductory
   General outline of the scene
   Who's who and what's what
   Incentives, people.
2. Movement —Sunday in the park—
   The Train in Silenus
   The drinkers
   The lovers in the grass
   Dogs
   The Evangelist
     He is given in
     short passages
     interspersed
   In the form of a picture
     contrasts
     Titian
       Claude Lorraine
   End with closing of the park.

(YCAL 185)

Such pages suggest that when stalled in the progress of composing *Paterson*, Williams wrote notes about the poem's organization rather than composing specific lines or sections. On the outline sheet for Book One, he placed numbered sections with no language assigned to them. Several manuscripts are filled with headings like "Introductory parts," "General outline," "initial parts," and "short passages." Often, Williams labeled a category of material as "titled" or "sub-titled," but such sections were not necessarily identified by any thematic material; rather, it was only imperative that Williams organize them into "parts." As much as it does to some quality of the place Paterson, the title of Book One, "The Delineaments of the Giants," perhaps refers to Williams' endless outline of the mythic, skeletal structure of his poem. Furthermore, this practice of sketching general categories did not stop after Williams began publishing the poem. One handwritten sheet of notes for Book Four contains a "scheme" for the drama of "two

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women—two silly women," and on the back Williams has simply drawn three oblong squares (carefully positioned into blocks on the page), and the only words attached to them are the labels "chorus," "antichorus," and "comment" (YCAL 189).

Finally, one early manuscript page demonstrates how Williams used the drafts of *Paterson* almost as a source of internal dialogue about the poem, urgently reminding himself how and why he should "begin" and "complete" its text:

> THE BOOK, AS A WHOLE, AS IT IS TO BE—NOW, COMPLETED:
> The Great and Magnificent Poem
> PATERSON
> or
> HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU
> (Put everything I've written—pieces, bits, revisions, into etc.) (UB E4)

Such a note suggests that Williams had a "completed" sense of the "whole" poem in the midst of a passing moment of its composition. His habit of schematizing the poem in its early stages may even have come at the expense of composing its actual parts. "There'll be a section on Billy Sunday who lectured here in 1923 at the time of strike," he claimed, followed by the question, "a synthesis is necessary, but—where? which part should be squeezed up?" (UB E4). On another page from this section of early notes, he wrote the order of passages between Books One and Two: "End Part I / Then a sequence of Lyle / Include: the old city / more Lyle / Part II" (UB E4). Words such as "now," "complete," "outline," and "plan" predominate in the hundreds of notes and drafts Williams made for *Paterson*, and they demonstrate the poet's desire to plan the text "all at once," without concern for the fluctuating language of individual lines or sections.

In the midst of such plans, Williams wrote, revised, and rearranged a stanza which would appear, finally, in section two of Book One:

> . . . a mass of detail
> to interrelate on a new ground, difficultly;
> an assonance, a homologue
> triple piled
> pulling the disparate together to clarify
> and compress
> (*P*, p. 20)

These lines suggest that *Paterson* is a poem which embodies its own search for form, but that such a form will be, at best, an "assonance." Sections will rhyme only in partial ways, and the body of the poem will

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become a "homologue": a structure composed of parts that correspond only by analogy, but derived from the same origin—the "whole" of *Paterson* before its growth and "particulars" violated an idealized form.[15]

After he completed Book One, Williams wrote to Jean Untermeyer regarding the availability of form in modern poetry: "We can't have a new (or old) poem built on a no-good or worn-out framework or underbody. Everything else of the poem comes *after* a proper framework has been raised. You may take a block of stone and carve a figure of it without an *apparent* support but the frame is there tacitly before the start is made" (*SL*, p. 268). This comment, like those of the manuscript pages, reveals a poet who desired both a sense of "order" and "measure" at the same moment he collected a "mass" of fragmentary detail that shifted considerably from book to book before the poem went to publication.

With such a "falsely complete" notion of the overall structure of the poem, it should not surprise us that, even after Williams received the galleys for Book One, in September of 1945, he felt a great deal of frustration with the poem. Upon seeing the page proofs, he wrote to Laughlin that "*Paterson* looks pretty bad to me. I don't know what to do. What I have done (avoiding dramatics) is to slash it unmercifully. No use trying to rewrite. I'll have to stand or fall on whatever merits may exist in the thing now. I feel like hell over it" (7 Sept. 1945). When he apologized to Laughlin about such extensive revisions to the poem in galley form, Williams explained that *Paterson* now looked "as tho' an atomic bomb had hit it before it was born" (19 Sept. 1945), a comment that suggests how undifferentiated and simultaneous creative birth and destruction were in his imagination.

The form of *Paterson*, however "assuredly" Williams saw its "end in its beginning" (*P*, p. 3), was only imaginatively whole for the poet, a type of creative alchemy which, however artificial, was nonetheless central to his being able to write the poem. When he writes that he must "remake" himself in order to "begin composing again," he is commenting on the discrepancy between his intellectual idealization of the text and his own role in writing it. Williams' compiling of Books One through Five dramatically enacts the regenerative possibilities of language and imagination he creates so vividly in *In the American Grain*, to merge the past, present, and future in one historical moment or image. Throughout his commentaries on *Paterson*, Williams describes his progress through the material as if the entire project were somehow exempt from any chronological sequence. An "atomic bomb" destroys

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the page proofs of Book One, "*before they were born.*" As he "writes and destroys" Book One, he knows the poem has "got to be pushed out of me somehow and in *some perfect form.*" The form of the poem—"involving the future and the past"—may prove too much for his "weak powers."

Throughout his comments to Laughlin, Williams urgently revealed the pressure he felt to acknowledge a moment of origin for a poem that he wanted to ensure will transcend time altogether. For Williams, the desire to perceive the whole poem in the midst of completing its parts book by book and line by line was crucial to his desire to overcome the historical context of his own writing. By incessantly outlining the "schematic" parts to *Paterson*'s shape and form, by juxtaposing previously written lyrics or stanzas within the poem, by pretending that the poem existed as a "fully formed" artifact before any of its lines were arranged—Williams created for *Paterson* a lyric version of the Mendelian chart, with its "identity / predicted before it was found" (*P*, p. 179). In one of the most haunting letters to Laughlin about composing the poem, in February of 1944, Williams complained of his inability to find the time to get back to the *Paterson* material: "If only I live to work out ⅕ of the implications" (28 Feb. 1944). The fraction seems like an arbitrary number, but years after the fact, it's impossible not to leap ahead, to consider the five constituent parts that exist in the "finished" version of the poem, and to wonder, in an oddly prophetic way, that perhaps Williams knew of them too, "before they were born."

In essence, there were three major phases in the composition of *Paterson*, all of which represent a larger portion of Williams' early career than is frequently assumed. The first stage involved his increasing desire to write the long poem, not necessarily inspired by Eliot's *Waste Land*, but certainly fueled by his antagonism toward the more successful poet. Beginning with "The Wanderer" and throughout the 1920s, Williams sought a form and a character for "Mr. Paterson," and dating a portion of the epic poem during this period suggests that we see it in terms of the improvisations Williams experimented with during these years. With the publication of "Patterson: Episode 17," Williams entered the second, but perhaps more important, period of design for the poem. By this point, he realized that *Paterson* would consist of separate episodes or sequences, arranged in a loose structure he would impose not for the sake of narrative continuity, but rather for his emphatic denial of it (although some "details" or verses are numbered within the manuscripts, there are no episodes one through sixteen). The last phase

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of Williams' involvement with the poem occurred between 1937 and 1945, in which he spent equally as much creative energy trying to describe its "plan," "outline," or "scheme" as he did in actually writing the poem. Read in conjunction with the various drafts, these outlines become central to our understanding the poem's fragmentary, unresolved structure, as well as its emphatically referential quality.

Since the drafts of Books One through Four circulated freely among Williams' organizing envelopes, all four Books may be said to have been composed in a contemporaneous fashion. Several sections, incidents, and characters existed in overlapping pages and multiple books: the "preface" for Book Three eventually became interspersed with each of its three sections; several elements of "Sunday in the Park" occur in the draft pages of Book One; Madame Curie existed at one point as a foil to Mrs. Cumming in Book One; the details about the Van Winkle murders of Book Four were gathered in 1942 for inclusion in Book One or Two; the preacher Klaus appears in the draft pages of all four books. Lyric fragments and "details" of episodes existed for Williams as literal and metaphoric carbon copies he could insert at various places in the poem, rearranging them incessantly in the different drafts, and resisting, as long as possible, a "finished" poem which, "once it escapes, may rot its way into a thousand minds . . . a black smut, and all libraries, of necessity, be burned to the ground as a consequence" (*SL*, p. 129). By rearranging the individual parts of the poem, Williams resisted composing its final, finished form, and thus could maintain its idealized coherence. Once Williams arranged the published order of parts in Book One, he acknowledged that there could only be so much indeterminate structure in the poem, and his "battle" with the galleys and page proofs indicates how much he truly desired to leave the poem at the level of the "inarticulate Beautiful Thing" of *Paterson*. When he finalized the order of individual parts, Williams was at a loss to compose a great deal of new material for the poem, and thus he relied upon a pastiche of separate fragments and "songs written previously" to create and complete the poem's form.

One of the reasons that the poem takes on such a different tone as it progresses through its five books is that Williams used more and more of the material he had rejected in arranging individual sections. In fact, one note for Book Five, dated in 1952, contains the scheme to include in this section "everything—left over" (YCAL 190). It should not surprise us, then, that Williams would include Floss' comment on the later portions of the poem as a way of admitting how much his energies had declined: "What I miss . . . is the poetry, the pure poem / of the first

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parts" (*P*, p. 171). The "pure poem" for Williams existed perhaps only in its draft pages, full of notes scrawled on calendar pages, fragments of dialogue he could rearrange at will, vague outlines and episodes he could repeat at random again and again in different sections. Once Williams published the first few books of the poem, his imaginative interaction with the poem began to falter, a demise made all the more emphatic by his first heart attack in 1948.

The greatest evidence to suggest that *Paterson* was a text that faded from Williams' imaginative pursuit (or at least, that it became a very different type of poem than he originally conceived) is the relationship between its publication and his physical demise. Williams' letters to Laughlin—even before his first heart attack in 1948—suggest that the poet was a man who was feeling, in a considerable way, the effects of his age. In early 1942, he remarks that his eyes are consistently strained, thus keeping him from working on *Paterson*.

In 1944, depressed about the way "poets are being pursued by philosophers today," he asks: "Am I living too long? I wonder—..." (14 Jan. 1944). Throughout 1944 and 1945, he complains to Laughlin that his health and poor eyesight are keeping him from the poem. Paul Mariani has documented the effects of Williams' failing health and spirits during the last phase of his life, but we should never underestimate his incredible desire to get on with the writing. Reading his letters to Laughlin, beginning as early as 1942, one hears a strenuous urgency: "It may prove too late." "If only I live to work out ⅓ of its implications." "Life isn't long enough for anything else." "If I ever finish the Paterson—even the introduction which I'll do shortly unless I die first which ain't possible." Such phrases haunt his letters five years before his first heart attack, and are vivid reminders to us that Williams was struggling against the deadline of his own mortality in bringing this material toward publication. As he used up more and more of the material which had been written and compiled in the decades before Book One was published, the pressure to compose new material increased, which explains in large part the heightened and vulnerable tone of Books Three and Four.

My suggestion that the publication of Book One might have signaled a metaphorical "end" to the poem might seem exaggerated to some, particularly those readers who believe that Book Five represents the penultimate achievement of Williams' plan (or career). My scrutiny and description of his impulses in gathering the materials for *Paterson* is not aimed at undermining the importance of the later books, for the poet or his readers. If anything, Williams' achievement seems even

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more remarkable once we establish how varied his task was in bringing the poem to publication. In fact, the poem becomes a kind of tapestry of styles that summarize Williams' work in several genres: the improvisational fragments developed in *Kora in Hell* (1920); the historical "reawakening" of characters and scenes practiced in *In the American Grain* (1925); the fictional portraits of *The Knife of the Times* (1932), *White Mule* (1937), and *Life along the Passaic River* (1938); as well as his "trial horses" to capture "a play in verse" (*Many Loves* and *A Dream of Love*). Looking at the poem in relation to its manuscripts and drafts suggests a formal coherence of Books One through Three, if only because Book Four seems the most "undisclosed" to Williams during the early gathering stage, and then was later written in the compositional solitude and space at Yaddo in 1950.[16] Many readers have suggested that the "idyl" of Corydon and Phyllis represents a falling away from the pace and tone of the previous books, but oddly enough, their dramatic "interlude" evokes a return of sorts to a central concept of the poem—to enact the drama of modern Paterson through extended dialogues between the characters of "Doc and Willie" (UB E10).

For all its formal innovation and textual surprises, *Paterson* is also a long poem composed of quite discrete (and somewhat traditional) component parts: short lyrics, dramatic "interludes," embedded narratives arranged in small blocks of "detail." The experimentation which occurs in *Paterson* is driven by Williams' ability to weave these "songs" written previously into a poem that defies our attempts to find its beginning or end. The individual pieces of language and form became fragments shored by Williams against the ruin of his own idealized form. As a long poem, *Paterson* may ultimately be read as a sum far greater than its individual parts, a "mathematics" which divides its "particulars" even as it gathers them. The "beautiful thing" of *Paterson* may have faded from the idealized scene of Williams' imagination, but his decision and desire to "complete" the poem, to carry it forward as a "whole" artifact, for the duration of his life, is a testimony to his belief in the regenerative features of poetry, for him and for us.

[1] Paul Mariani's biography, *William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), offers the most detailed description of Williams' engagement with the project (pp. 409–518), quoting generously from letters and notebooks during this period. His claim that Williams "wrote and rewrote his epic over and over, using fragments from earlier attempts

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palimpsest-like in his later constructions" (p. 818) is typical of the way critics often retreat from a precise textual study of the *Paterson* manuscripts. Specific studies that contain remarks on Williams' progress through the poem include: Joel Conarroe, *William Carlos Williams' Paterson: Language and Landscape* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), which discusses the drafts for the "preface" to the poem (pp. 52–62); Mike Weaver, *William Carlos Williams: The American Background* (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1971), who emphasizes David Lyle's letters to Williams as the poet searches for "structural method" (pp. 122–27); in "William Carlos Williams' 'Paterson': The Search for the Redeeming Language—A Personal Epic in Five Parts," *New Directions 17* (New York: New Directions, 1961), John Thirlwall uses a number of manuscripts and personal conversations with Williams to chart the forty-five-year history of the poem, focusing on Williams' search for an "American language" (pp. 252–310); F. Douglas Fiero provides a lengthy analysis of Williams' progress between 1927 and the publication of Book One, in "Williams Creates the First Book of *Paterson*," *Journal of Modern Literature*, 3 (1974), 964–86; in her chapter in *Paterson* in *On the Modernist Long Poem* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1986), Margaret Dickie analyzes Williams' "extended effort to find an image that would embody the whole knowable world," and the effect of such a search on our interpretation of the poem (pp. 77–105). My argument, while not altogether contradicting these critics, emphasizes more the effect of considering *Paterson*'s fragments as fragments, and stresses the way they gathered and dissolved beneath Williams' persistent efforts to bring them together.

[2] Mariani, *William Carlos Williams*, p. 460.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 263.

[4] William Carlos Williams to James Laughlin, 6 Jan. 1941. I am greatly indebted to James Laughlin for permission to read and quote from these unpublished letters in this essay. After its completion, a volume of selected correspondence between Williams and Laughlin appeared, and readers will find several of the letters mentioned here in that volume: *William Carlos Williams and James Laughlin: Selected Letters*, ed., Hugh Witemeyer (New York: Norton, 1989).

[5] For facsimile reproductions of these four outline sheets, see Margaret Glynne Lloyd, *William Carlos Williams' 'Paterson': A Critical Reappraisal* (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Press, 1980), p. 215.

[6] Neil Baldwin, "Pulling the Disparate Together: A Note on the Problem of Order in *Paterson*," *William Carlos Williams Newsletter*, 3, No. 1 (1977), 14–15.

[7] Most of the manuscripts for *Paterson* are housed in the Poetry Collection of the Lockwood Library at the State University of New York at Buffalo and the Collection of American Literature at the Beinecke Library at Yale University. As Paul Mariani notes, "other pieces of the puzzle are scattered, Osiris-like, in other libraries and in private collections" (*William Carlos Williams*, p. 818). One of the more frustrating aspects of trying to reconstruct Williams' pursuit of the *Paterson* material is that the manuscripts for the poem are split among these two collections. The collection at Buffalo contains most of the early materials, including the manuscripts for Books One and Two; the Beinecke houses drafts for books Three through Six, although there is one key folder in the Yale collection that appears to contain very early notes and drafts for the poem.

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[8] In *The Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), Rod Townley describes Williams' first volume of *Poems* (1909) as "obedient" verses that demonstrate the conflict between the literary models of Keats and Whitman (p. 24). James Breslin, *William Carlos Williams: An American Artist* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970; rev. 1985) also argues the importance of Keats in Williams' apprenticeship (pp. 3–24).

[9] Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Library, Yale University. All subsequent references to the manuscripts at Yale will be cited parenthetically (YCAL), followed by their catalog number. Previously unpublished material (copyright © 1989 by William Eric Williams and Paul H. Williams) is used by permission of this library as well as New Directions Publishing Corporation, agents for William Eric Williams and Paul H. Williams.

[10] The page proofs and galleys for Book One, housed at the Kent State Libraries, demonstrate how much Book One was a pastiche of previously written poems, the most important of which was the 1927 "Paterson."

[11] The manuscripts at the Poetry Collection, State University of New York at Buffalo have been cataloged and listed in Neil Baldwin and Steven L. Meyers, eds., *The Manuscripts and Letters of William Carlos Williams in the Poetry Collection of the Lockwood Library, State University of New York at Buffalo: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1978). All subsequent references to these manuscripts will be cited parenthetically in the text (UB), followed by their catalog number. Previously unpublished material (copyright © 1989 by William Eric Williams and Paul H. Williams) is used by permission of this library as well as New Directions Publishing Corporation, agents for William Eric Williams and Paul H. Williams.

[12] William Carlos Williams, "Paterson: Book III / Preface," *12th Street, New York*, 3, No. 1 (Dec. 1949), 9–11. Specific appraisal of the short lyrics published during Williams' life all begin with Emily Mitchell Wallace's *A Bibliography of William Carlos Williams* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1968).

[13] Mariani, *William Carlos Williams*, pp. 387–88.

[14] This variant spelling also forces us to qualify our understanding of the poem's title as representative of a verbal pun of "Pater (i.e., father)-son." Sister Bernetta Quinn first posed this reading in *The Metamorphic Tradition in Modern Poetry* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1955), p. 90. Charles Doyle, *William Carlos Williams and the American Poem* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), makes the point that "Patterson" is the name of a New York town in which Hart Crane worked on his long poem, *The Bridge*, thus suggesting an influence on Williams during *Paterson*'s early stages (p. 189).

[15] Williams' conception of *Paterson*'s structure as a "body" is shown by those manuscripts for Book One on which he labeled various sections "The Head," "The Heart," and "The Belly" (UB E13). Even though Williams erased these subtitles, they still suggest his desire to construct a skeletal form for the poem before he had written its actual content.

[16] Mariani, *William Carlos Williams*, p. 618.

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William Carlos Williams' Triadic-Line Verse: An Analysis of Its Prosody

Eleanor Berry

Williams' triadic-line verse constitutes a relatively small portion of his poetic work—two books of the Fifties, *The Desert Music* (except for its long title poem) and *Journey to Love*, plus parts of *Paterson V*.[1] Nonetheless, the poet's statements of the importance of this form as his "solution of the problem of modern verse," the "culmination" of a lifelong "striving" to invent a new form equivalent to the forms of the past, have led to a focus of attention on the triadic-line verse—and the "variable foot" by which it was presumably "measured"—quite out of proportion to its representation in the poet's oeuvre. Despite all the attention they have received, however, there is still no critical consensus as to the nature of Williams' variable foot and no generally accepted analysis of the prosody of the triadic-line verse.

Interpretations of the Variable Foot

The variable foot has been taken as (1) a temporal unit, each step of a triadic line being equal in duration to every other (Donoghue, Weatherhead, Breslin); (2) a stress-based unit, each step of a triadic line containing a single major stress (Duncan, Hedges); (3) a syntactical unit, each step of a triadic line being a single complete phrase or clause (Solt, Hofstadter); (4) a unit of meaning or attention (Goodman, Hofstadter); (5) a unit of phrasing in reading, the triadic lineation constituting a score for performance (Wagner); and (6) a visual unit (Shapiro, Perloff, Sayre, Cushman). Each of these interpretations had made its appearance

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by 1969. Besides these relatively concrete and positive suggestions as to the basis of the triadic-line verse, there have also been more diffuse and negative ones (Miller, Guimond). Since their early formulation, nearly all of these interpretations have found further champions.[2]

The confusion is not quite so complete as it may at first appear—it is mitigated by the fact that not all of the views advanced are mutually contradictory. A recent formulation by Emily Mitchell Wallace, though diffuse, adumbrates some sort of reconciliation among, or synthesis of, several of the six views. She has described the variable foot as "a unit of poetic language that is the length appropriate to its overall intensity (stress) of sound, sense, typographical appearance, and the 'something else' that comes from the tension of the units in relation to one another."[3] The interpretation of the variable foot as a stress-based unit does not contradict the interpretation of it as a temporal unit, if we take into account the principle of isochrony. According to Kenneth L. Pike, "English sentences are spoken with recurrent bursts of speed, with long or short pauses or with intonation breaks between," and these "rhythm units" "tend to follow one another in such a way that the lapse of time between the beginning of their prominent syllables is somewhat uniform."[4] The interpretations of the variable foot as a temporal unit and as a stress-based unit can, in turn, be reconciled with the interpretation of it as a syntactical unit if we accept Pike's generalization that "Words in a very close grammatical association are likely to belong to the same rhythm unit."[5] And Pike's rhythm unit is first of all a unit of performance, so if the variable foot is understood as a rhythm unit in Pike's sense, it is a temporal unit, a stress-based unit, a syntactical unit, and a unit of phrasing at once. The notion of the rhythm unit thus subsumes interpretations 1, 2, 3, and 5. Nor should we be surprised to find a correlation between syntactic units or units of phrasing and semantic units, so these interpretations may be resolvable not only with each other but also with interpretation 4. Only the sixth interpretation, that the variable foot is a visual unit, a unit of typography, seems irreconcilable with the rest—at least if one takes it (as Sayre and Cushman apparently do) that the typographic divisions in Williams' triadic-line verse are arbitrary with respect to other aspects of the text structure.

Interpretations of the Intonation Unit

Since Pike's formulations in 1956, a considerable body of research and theory has grown up respecting English intonation. The literature

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on intonation is highly suggestive with respect to Williams' triadic-line verse. In a survey published in 1986, Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen classifies linguists' theories of what constitutes the basic unit of intonation as (1) "physiological accounts," (2) "semantic/grammatical accounts," and (3) "phonetic/phonological accounts."[6] This classification suggests the same diversity and the same kinds of diversity as we have found in the interpretations of Williams' variable foot.

David Crystal gives a phonetic/phonological description of the "tone-unit" as consisting "minimally of a *tonic syllable*, expounded by one of a set of *nuclear tones* (falling, rising, etc.), and optionally preceded and followed by other syllables involving differing degrees of pitch- and loudness-prominence."[7] But Crystal's 1975 account falls under Couper-Kuhlen's second class, "semantic/grammatical," as well as her third, for he claims a correlation between intonation and syntax. He even constructs a simple flowchart for segmenting sentences into tone-units on the basis of syntax.

Gillian Brown, Karen L. Currie, and Joanne Kenworthy, in contrast, take a position on the unit of intonation roughly equivalent to the position that the steps of Williams' triadic line are simply visual or typographic units. Finding, in spontaneous conversation, pitch and pause phenomena often in conflict with each other in signaling intonation unit boundaries, and syntactic/semantic criteria often at odds with one or both, they concluded, in 1980, that analysis of conversational speech into intonation units was impossible (because of conflicting criteria) and fell back on analyzing it into "pause-defined units."[8]

Bengt Altenberg, whose recent research is directed toward developing an algorithm for the intonation of synthesized speech, has tested Crystal's flowchart in a detailed analysis of "a partly scripted but rather informal talk."[9] Altenberg attempts a synthesis of different interpretations in a fourfold definition of a tone-unit as:

(a) a *cognitive* unit, maximally consisting of one newly activated concept and (optionally) some already active (or semi-active) concepts;
(b) a *textual* unit, consisting of a part typically carrying new information and optionally preceded by a part carrying given information;
(c) A *prosodic* unit, manifested as a coherent intonation contour optionally bounded by a pause and containing (among other things) a salient pitch movement (the nucleus), normally at the end of the unit;

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(d) a *grammatical* unit, containing at least one phrase or clause element but often a more extensive grammatical structure.[10]

This fourfold definition of an intonation unit looks remarkably like a synthesis of interpretations 2–5 of the variable foot.

There appears, however, to be at least one major difficulty with Altenberg's fourfold definition—that is, that the four structures do not always line up, indeed, only rarely do so except, perhaps, in highly planned speech. Thus Couper-Kuhlen concludes that "the tone-unit is a unit of speech planning which is not fully sensitive to syntactic criteria" because speakers do not always plan their utterances in successive syntactic units.[11] Couper-Kuhlen is apparently most comfortable with a phonetic/phonological definition of the tone-unit as "a stretch of utterance which has at least one prominent syllable with major pitch movement," the boundaries of which "are frequently accompanied by a short pause," by "other articulatory cues such as phonetic lengthening or aspiration at the end of a tone-unit," and by "an audible step-up or step-down in pitch" to the given speaker's normal pitch level for tone-unit onset.[12]

Alan Cruttenden likewise identifies several phonetic correlates of intonation-group boundaries—pause, acceleration, syllable-lengthening, and change in pitch level or direction. Recognizing the ambiguity of intonational-boundary signals in spontaneous conversation, however, Cruttenden does not take the presence of one or more of these phonetic features as sufficient to indicate an intonation-group boundary. If one or more of these typical boundary features "divide an utterance into two part-utterances either one of which does not have the minimum internal structure of an intonation-group," then Cruttenden takes them as representing hesitation rather than as an intonation-group boundary. This minimum internal structure consists of "at least one stressed syllable" plus "a pitch movement to or from at least one accented syllable."[13]

Cruttenden's approach to intonation is especially suggestive with respect to Williams' triadic-line verse. His treatment of pause, the first of the typical phonetic correlates of intonation unit boundary, is especially applicable to Williams' step- and triad-divisions. Cruttenden classifies pauses into three groups depending on whether they occur (1) "at major constituent boundaries," (2) "before words of high lexical content . . . typically . . . before a minor constituent boundary . . . e.g., between a determiner and following head noun," or (3) "after the first word in an intonation-group." Only the first of these kinds of pause does he take as indicative of an intonation-group boundary. Pauses of

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the second and third kinds "are not taken as markers of intonation-group boundaries, because they do not result in utterance chunks each of which has a pitch pattern typically contained within an intonation-group."[14] Williams' step-divisions occur most often at major constituent boundaries, but some also occur before words (or phrases or parts of phrases) with high lexical content, some after the first word (or two) of a plausible intonation unit. The latter two kinds of divisions seem to mimic hesitation phenomena in spontaneous speech.

Step-Divisions as Correlates of Intonation Unit Boundaries

After reviewing the literature on intonation, we can see that the divisions in Williams' triadic-line verse typically delimit syntactical/semantic units that, in a performance of the text, could be intonation units, set off by pauses and each containing an accented syllable with a pitch obtrusion. The result would be a relatively high density of intonational divisions as compared with spontaneous conversational speech, such as Altenberg found in a partly scripted talk. Crystal has advanced the hypothesis that "clauses and sentences are the units of organization for relatively informal, fluent discourse, but elements of clause structure for more formal or less fluent situations."[15] In diction, syntax, and tone, most of Williams' poems in triadic-line verse are formal. At the same time, they often represent nonfluent utterance. The following passage from "Asphodel, that Greeny Flower" is formal language, representing nonfluent discourse, and its lineation correlates completely with a rather dense partitioning of the text into intonation units:

I have learned much in my life
from books
and out of them
about love.
Death
is not the end of it.
There is a hierarchy
which can be attained,
I think,
in its service.
Its guerdon
is a fairy flower;
a cat of twenty lives.
If no one came to try it
the world

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would be the loser.
        It has been
            for you and me
as one who watches a storm
        come in over the water.
            We have stood
from year to year
        before the spectacle of our lives
            with joined hands.
The storm unfolds.
        Lightning
            plays about the edges of the clouds.
The sky to the north
        is placid,
            blue in the afterglow
as the storm piles up.
        It is a flower
            that will soon reach
the apex of its bloom.
            (*CP2*, pp. 314–15)

The status of the triadic-line steps as possible intonation units may become clearer if we look at instances where Williams has divided similar text in different ways in two versions of the same poem. The different ways are evidently alternative possibilities (and not the only ones) for phrasing the text in question. Christopher MacGowan, who prints two versions of much of the goatherd's long concluding speech in Williams' translation of Theocritus' "Idyl I," makes such a comparison conveniently possible. Here are the respective beginnings of the two versions of the passage:

        a tendril is twisted
            joyful with the saffron fruit.
Inside
        is drawn a girl,
            as fair a thing
as the gods have made
        dressed in a sweeping
            gown,
her hair is done up
        in a snood.

        and about it
            is twisted
a tendril joyful with the saffron fruit.

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Within,
is limned a girl,
as fair a thing as the gods have made,
dressed in a sweeping
gown.
Her hair
is confined by a snood.[16]

The noun phrase "as fair a thing as the gods have made," with its embedded, rank-shifted clause, can readily be spoken as a single intonation unit—as it is printed in the one version—or as two, with the division coming before the conjunction—as it appears in the other version. Likewise, the clause "Her hair is done up <confined by> a snood" can readily be spoken as a single intonation unit or as two; if as two, the division can readily be placed between the subject and the verb—where the break between steps appears in one of Williams' versions—or between the verb and the following prepositional phrase—where the break appears in the other version. The second version quoted exhibits greater variation in length among its intonation units; a reorganization of syntax plus relineation produces the relatively long intonation unit "a tendril joyful with the saffron fruit," the exceptional length of this step drawing attention to the image it presents and to its figurative language. Interestingly, the break least likely as an intonation-unit boundary, that between "sweeping" and "gown," appears in both versions. If we respect it, too, as scoring for intonation, we discover that it has the rhetorical effect of throwing emphasis on "sweeping" that this adjectival would not get in the likelier phrasing, "dressed in a sweeping gown." Placement of emphasis is, of course, one of the functions of intonation in speech.

Even before he had coined for it the confusing name of "variable foot," Williams was clear that the "rhythm unit" of a text was not a matter of syllable count or stress placement (hence, the deficiency of the traditional foot, if mistaken as an intended rhythm unit). Thus, in an undated typescript titled "Speech Rhythm,"[17] he describes the rhythm unit of verse in terms very close to those linguists would later use to characterize intonation units:

> For practical purposes and for me the unit is of convenient length, such as may be appreciated at one stroke of attention, that is, to hold it; it should be in good scale as the architects say . . . .
>
> The rhythm unit is simply any repeated sequence of lengths and heights. Upon this ether the sounds are strung in their variety . . . .

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> Here, then, is the touchstone to it all: though the sounds of speech, i.e., words, letters, poetic lines, what not, convey the rhythm to a passion yet the rhythm itself is a thing apart and no sound. Upon this the wordy passions string sounds as they strain toward the perfect image.
>
> The one thing essential to rhythm is not sound but motion, of the two kinds, forward and up and down, rapidity of motion and quality of motion.
>
> Thus the number of sounds in the rhythm unit do not because of their number give the unit any quality but only as they give motion in one of the two directions.[18]

If this explanation is less than perspicuous, it nonetheless recognizes rhythm as a matter of supra- or non-segmental, rather than segmental, phonology ("the rhythm itself is a thing apart and no sound") and as a matter of cognitive experience ("the unit is of convenient length, such as may be appreciated at one stroke of attention"). And it recognizes duration and pitch ("motion, of the two kinds, forward and up and down, rapidity of motion and quality of motion") as features relevant to the perception of rhythm and the units thereof.

The correspondence of step-divisions to possible intonation-unit boundaries in such verse as that so far quoted produces an even, rather stately movement. Thom Gunn's claim that the rhythms of Williams' triadic-line verse "are as flexible and varied as the best of his earlier poetry"[19] generally does not seem justified, especially in relation to *Journey to Love*, where the verse is more regular than in either earlier or later uses of the form. Much closer to the truth was Kenneth Rexroth, when he said of the triadic-line verse that its "metric flows as smoothly as water."[20] Rexroth spoke approvingly, but readers predisposed toward the jerky, jagged Williams will probably not share his attitude. It is an ironic result of Williams' effort to find a form with greater freedom than accentual-syllabic meter that he freed the syllables only to restrict the rhythm, while writers of competent accentual-syllabic verse count their syllables, but thereby keep their rhythms variable.[21] His failure to appreciate that rhythmic variety is a possible concomitant to metrical regularity probably derives from his assumption—a common one—that meter, specifically, the measurement of verse in accentual-syllabic feet, is a (crude) way of controlling the rhythm of the verse.

As the traditional foot may be realized by ictic and non-ictic syllables of various degrees of stress, so Williams' "variable foot" is realized in triadic-line steps constituting syntactical units of various levels and grammatical functions and consisting of widely varying

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numbers of syllables. And as poets may depart from the norm of a given accentual-syllabic meter by various "substitutions," such as the inverted first foot in an iambic line, so the steps of Williams' triadic lines occasionally contain more than one intonation unit. Such deviant lines sometimes contain two complete intonation units, sometimes one complete unit and part of another. Where intonation units are not coextensive with steps, they are marked off by punctuation. The beginning of the passage from *Paterson II*, in which Williams retrospectively "discovered" his variable foot, and which he subsequently republished as "The Descent," contains an example of such a deviant step:

> The descent beckons·
> as the ascent beckoned.
> Memory is a kind
> of accomplishment
> a sort of renewal
> even
> an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new places
> inhabited by hordes
> heretofore unrealized,
> of new kinds—
> since their movements
> are toward new objectives
> (even though formerly they were abandoned).
> (*CP2*, p. 245)

The first step of the third triadic line continues past a comma marking the beginning of a finite subordinate clause, past the end of a short intonation unit consisting of a simple noun phrase (a noun modified only by a single determiner), to the end of an exceptionally long intonation unit (eight words constituting a potentially complete clause). The resultant step contrasts strikingly with the preceding step, a one-word intonation unit. The effect of the deviation here, following an opposite extreme of variation, is expressive/mimetic, representing the sudden, unexpected appearance of expansive spaces, expressing the mental and emotional liberation for which the "spaces" are a metaphor. In the *Paris Review* interview, Williams pointed specifically to the line (or step) we have been discussing, saying, "You see how I run that line? I was very excited when I wrote this."[22] Its deviance from his metrical norm may reflect his excitement at the point of composition, and/or he may have been excited by the deviation itself.

In Williams' triadic-line verse in general, possibilities for deviation from the norm are much less exploited than possibilities for variation

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within it. Some of the critical confusion about the nature of the measure he called the "variable foot" may result from the fact that the two pairs of triadic lines (the opening lines of "To Daphne and Virginia" and "For Eleanor and Bill Monahan" respectively) that he selected to quote in a famous letter to Richard Eberhart, in which he attempted to explain this measure, both contain a deviant step (*SL*, pp. 326–27). If we look at the entire first verse paragraph of "To Daphne and Virginia," the deviation in the third step of the second triadic line appears much more clearly as exactly that—a deviation:

> The smell of the heat is boxwood
> when rousing us
> a movement of the air
> stirs our thoughts
> that had no life in them
> to a life, a life in which
> two women agonize:
> to live and to breathe is no less.
> Two young women.
> The box odor
> is the odor of that of which
> partaking separately,
> each to herself
> I partake also
> . . . . separately.
> (*CP2*, p. 246)

Where more than one punctuation/intonation unit is included within one typographic step, this reader is inclined to read/"hear" a shorter pause at the intonation-unit boundary than if it coincided with a line/step division. Typically, as here, this pause reduction, this hastening on to the next intonation unit, suggests excitement, has an expressive and/or mimetic function.

The case of "For Eleanor and Bill Monahan" is more problematic, for the poem includes not only a high proportion of steps containing more than one intonation unit, but also passages with line-/step-divisions that strand closed-class items—prepositions, determiners, pronouns—that are rarely followed by intonation-unit boundaries in speech.[23] The following passage is an example:

> There are men
> who as they live
> fling caution to the
> wind and women praise them
> and love them for it.

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Cruel as the claws of
a cat .

(*CP2*, pp. 254–55)

Line-endings such as those of the third steps of each of the two complete triads quoted here are not, any more than Cruttendon's second and third categories of pause, to be taken as marking tone-unit boundaries. In the present case, their principal function seems to be to break up two clichés. If such strong enjambment, especially without apparent expressive function, were common in the triadic-line verse, we should be forced to conclude that it is an instance of arbitrary form.[24] As matters stand, however, it is the proverbial exception that proves the rule.

The majority of Williams' verse in the triadic line is well-described as "classical."[25] This epithet fits verse in which the units correspond to intonation units in a rather densely divided performance of the text, verse such as that of the following passage from "To a Dog Injured in the Street" (and, indeed, of the whole poem):

I remember also
a dead rabbit
lying harmlessly
on the outspread palm
of a hunter's hand.
As I stood by
watching
he took a hunting knife
and with a laugh
thrust it
up into the animal's private parts.
I almost fainted.
Why should I think of that now?
The cries of a dying dog
are to be blotted out
as best I can.
René Char
you are a poet who believes
in the power of beauty
to right all wrongs.
I believe it also.
With invention and courage
we shall surpass
the pitiful dumb beasts,
let all men believe it,
as you have taught me also
to believe it.

(*CP2*, pp. 256–57)

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The variation here is both mimetic and expressive. While most of the steps are intonation units of between four and seven syllables, there are two of two syllables and one of ten syllables. One of the two shortest and the longest come one right after the other at the climactic point of the passage—"thrust it / up into the animal's private parts." The shortness of the first unit suggests an action both sudden and swift; the contrasting length of the unit that follows it forces us to hurry over the syllables, as one might speak in agitation, and thus helps to convey the emotional distress of the poem's speaker at this part of his recollection. Despite its exploitation of the variable length and syntactic structure of intonation units, however, the overall movement of this passage is monotonous.

To avoid such monotony, variation in the length and structure of the intonation units must be accompanied by occasional deviation from the norm of one complete intonation unit per step. Very successful in this respect is the concluding passage of "Shadows":

> Which leaves only the beasts and trees,
> crystals
> with their refractive surfaces
> and rotting things
> to stir our wonder.
> Save for the little
> central hole
> of the eye itself
> into which
> we dare not stare too hard
> or we are lost.
> The instant
> trivial as it is
> is all we have
> unless—unless
> things the imagination feeds upon,
> the scent of the rose,
> startle us anew.
> (*CP2*, p. 310)

The quicker and slower movement of longer and shorter steps gives variation in pacing; the contrast of the first and second steps of the first triadic line quoted is especially strong. In addition, deviation from the norm of alignment of intonational divisions with lineation highlights each of the two qualifications ("Save for . . ." and "unless . . . ") in the passage. A line-division intervenes between one premodifying adjective and a second, splitting "Save for the little / central hole" between the last

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step of one triad and the first step of the next, thereby throwing emphasis on the deferred element ("central hole") and the striking image it gives of the pupil of the eye. Later, the final step of the penultimate triadic line stammers, "unless—unless," to be followed by a long normal step; the swift, smooth flow of the latter comes as release after blockage.[26] The form functions expressively to suggest the movement of the speaker's mind, groping for, and finally finding, a solution.

Again in the concluding passage of "The Mental Hospital Garden," deviation from the norm for the triadic-line step combines with variation on it, for expressive effect. Note the concentration of exceptionally short intonation units, constituting several steps, and, in the final triadic line, the splitting of a short intonation unit by the division between the second and third steps:

> The saint
> has tactfully withdrawn.
> One
> emboldened,
> parting the leaves before her
> stands in the full sunlight,
> alone
> shading her eyes
> as her heart
> beats wildly
> and her mind
> drinks up
> the full meaning
> of it
> all!
> (*CP2*, p. 267)

Besides functioning expressively, the exceptionally short steps, plus the deviant enjambment, serve to differentiate this concluding passage from the rest of the poem, thereby enforcing closure.

Boundaries within and between Triads

So far, we have focused our attention on the steps or "variable feet" that go together in "threes, threes and threes" (*CP1*, p. 285) to make up the triadic line. We have not inquired whether there are any systematic differences among first, second, and third steps or considered the status of the whole triad as a structural unit.

Sentence-endings coincident with the end of the third step of a

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triad generally occur at the end of a section or whole poem or at a point of particular rhetorical significance. In "To a Dog Injured in the Street," for example, four of the five sentence-endings that coincide with the end of a third step mark the end of verse paragraphs. The exception is the step consisting of the single complete sentence "I believe it also," and the fact that this sentence ends at the end of a triad, as well as constituting a step, lends rhetorical emphasis to its assertion of belief. In addition, the penultimate triad of the poem ends at what is grammatically a sentence-ending, but it is punctuated by a comma, avoiding the full stop at this point where it would be doubly metrically reinforced. Of the remaining eight sentence-endings in the poem, three fall at the ends of the first steps, four at the ends of the second steps (one of these, marking the only other paragraph-ending in the poem, is not followed by a third step), and one occurs *within* a third.

Such a differential treatment of the third step with respect to sentence boundaries is necessary to sustain momentum within a verse paragraph. When a sentence concludes at the end of a first or second step, the diagonal thrust carries the reader on to the next step(s). At the end of a third step, syntactical expectation is needed to carry the reader back to the left margin—unless a definite full stop is wanted.

In poems where there is an appreciable amount of deviation from the norm of one complete intonation unit per step, sentence-endings *within* third steps are common. The beginning of a new sentence, which then follows within the same step, generates the syntactical expectation to carry the reader back to the left margin. In the coda of "To Daphne and Virginia," three of the seven sentence-endings occur late in third steps, followed only by a monosyllable or two (printed below in italics) commencing a new sentence:

Staying here in the country
on an old farm
we eat our breakfasts
on a balcony under an elm.
The shrubs below us
are neglected. *And*
there, penned in,
or he would eat the garden
lives a pet goose who
tilts his head
sidewise
and looks up at us,
a very quiet old fellow
who writes no poems.

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Fine mornings we sit there
while birds
come and go.
A pair of robins
is building a nest
for the second time
this season. *Men*
against their reason
speak of love, sometimes,
when they are old. *It is*
all they can do .
or watch a heavy goose
who waddles, slopping noisily in the mud of his pool
(*CP2*, pp. 248–59)

"And," "Men," "It is"—these bare beginnings of sentences carry the reader over the long swing back to the left margin, curious how these new sentences will continue. The commencement of a relative clause with the one word "who" at the end of the third step of the third triad in the passage operates similarly, to renew syntactical expectation where there would otherwise be none to carry the reader back to the left margin. Of the remaining four sentence-endings, one comes at the end of a first step, two at the end of second steps, and one—ending the poem—at the end of a third. In addition, two first steps end at potential sentence-endings, with a period preceded by white space; in each case, the sentence in question is then extended in the next line. If such punctuation, at a potential sentence-ending, occurred at the end of a third step, the double metrical reinforcement of the grammatical/punctuation boundary would make the continuation of the sentence much more abrupt and surprising than it seems where this boundary is countered by the diagonal thrust created by the indentations of the second and third steps.

As Stephen Cushman observes, "The end of the third [step] does not necessarily coincide with the closure of a three-part movement completely contained within the triad. In fact, such closed triads . . . are rare."[27] That sentences overflow triads, tending to end at the end of first or second steps more often than at the end of third steps, compensates for the coincidence of most steps with phrase or clause boundaries, giving the verse momentum and direction that it would otherwise lack. Cushman proposes taking the closed triad, with each step a syntactical unit, as a sort of base (not exactly a norm) against which to measure the structure of other, more typical triads, and he points out that Williams, in at least one instance, uses the closed triad

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for closure and thematic reinforcement. Cushman's example is the ending of "The Ivy Crown":

> We will it so
> and so it is
> past all accident.
> (*CP2*, p. 290)

Even in this position, however, Williams tends to avoid the closed triad with each step a syntactic/intonation unit, as if to prevent too heavy closure. Thus, at the close of "View by Color Photography on a Commercial Calendar," he prevents it by deviant strong enjambment of the preceding step/triad:

> where the sun shines
> of a springtime
> afternoon. Something
> has come to an end here,
> it has been accomplished.
> (*CP2*, p. 291)

Note also the use of a comma instead of a period at the end of the second step of the last triad, increasing the momentum carrying the reader to the very end of the poem.

Williams' triads are not stanzas—his triadic-line verse looks stichic and is arranged in verse paragraphs—but they are not exactly lines either. A vertically divided line is a curious sort of line. Besides, the perceptibility of a triadic line as a unit of repetition in the structure of the verse is undercut by the fact that, unlike quarks, Williams' steps do not appear only in threes. Some paragraphs end at the end of first or second steps, with a new triad commencing at the left margin at the beginning of the next paragraph. Some poems end at the end of first or second steps. More rarely, two-step lines occur within paragraphs ("Tribute to Painters" contains examples). A deviant short line in a poem of approximately equal undivided lines certainly does not violate the integrity of the line, but where the "line" is vertically divided, the occurrence of an incomplete triad is sufficient to give autonomy to the steps as lines in themselves. The occurrence of a dimeter line in a context of trimeter lines does not threaten to atomize the accentual-syllabic line into its constituent feet, for it is only the line, and not the feet, that is a perceptual unit in accentual-syllabic verse. But Williams' "variable foot" is a perceptual unit, a unit of formatting and, as a norm, of intonation—ready, as such, to assert it autonomy. Perhaps the most accurate description of the triadic-line format is one given by Williams

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himself in a 1953 letter to Srinivas Rayaprol—"an assembly of three-line groups" (*SL*, p. 40).

The Triadic Line as a Visual Form

In the face of the evidence that the steps of Williams' triadic lines—or "three-line groups"—are, as a norm, intonation units, it is difficult to agree with Stephen Cushman's reading of the letter to Eberhart: "Although Williams says to count beats, we are really counting lines."[28] Having perceived the regularity of a lineation based on intonation units, it is also difficult to agree with Henry Sayre that "the only consistent aspect to Williams' 'metric' is metrical inconsistency."[29] Indeed, both Cushman and Sayre, as well as Marjorie Perloff, belie their own arguments that the triadic-line verse is "symmetric inscription," its prosody "a visual one,"[30] that it is "the overall effect of the poem's visual *pattern of repetition*" that "makes each line . . . *seem* 'a single beat'—that is, a single move of the eye, and thus a single visual unit equal to the other units . . . of the poem."[31]

Thus, Cushman (as mentioned above) suggests taking the closed triadic line (which he calls a triadic stanza), *with each of its steps a syntactical unit*, as a base in terms of which other relations between thematic and (as he would have it) stanzaic structure can be perceived and interpreted.[32] Tone-unit chunking has been described in nearly the same terms, as "the grammatical formatting of speech."[33] Similarly, Perloff's recognition that the breaks between the line units in Williams' triadic-line verse come at points of "natural juncture" undercuts her position that the triadic line is purely a visual frame.[34] Sayre, if he does not perceive the nonvisual *regular*ity of the triadic-line verse, at least notes its nonvisual *real*ity, saying that "it allows the American idiom to determine the more or less 'loose' shape of the individual lines."[35] The intonation unit is just such a unit of speech.

Nonetheless, the triadic line *is* a visual form, though not exclusively a visual form. Its relevant visual features are (1) the appearance of descending steps produced by the pattern of indentation; (2) the appearance of "stichic accumulation" as opposed to a "stanzaic organization";[36] (3) the appearance of long-line verse (despite the shortness of many individual steps). I shall discuss each of these in turn.

Though Williams would, for a period in the Fifties, use it as a fixed form for all his poetry, when he first employed it in the "descent" passage of *Paterson*, the stepped triadic line was clearly a nonce form for a particular poetic occasion—a representational form, presenting a

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visual image of descent. Fortunately, there are other themes and subjects besides descent (figurative or literal) for which a format of stepped indentation is apt.

While a succession of left-justified lines does not, partly because of the conventionality of that format, make itself felt as successive, a format that creates a left-to-right diagonal down the page promotes awareness of the successive nature of reading and of the temporality of the linguistic medium. In "Asphodel, that Greeny Flower," where the text is a representation of an utterance spoken under pressure of time, the foregrounding of the temporal aspect of language by the format enhances the thematic emphasis:

> There is something
> something urgent
> I have to say to you
> and you alone
> but it must wait
> while I drink in
> the joy of your approach
> perhaps for the last time.
> And so
> with fear in my heart
> I drag it out
> and keep on talking
> for I dare not stop.
> Listen while I talk on
> against time.
> It will not be
> for long.
> (*CP2*, p. 311)

Time is a theme of many of Williams' poems composed in the stepped triadic line. The format is suitable for such poems, because it tends to make a sense of temporality part of the experience of reading the poem.

A number of critics have spoken of Williams' stepped triads as triadic stanzas or claimed that there is no significant difference between his triadic-line verse and his earlier verse in tercets. However, even if we leave aside the fact that the lines of Williams' tercets, couplets, and quatrains of the Twenties, Thirties, and Forties and, again, in the poems first collected in *Pictures from Brueghel* (1962), are not, as a rule, intonation units, but crosscut the syntactical structure of the text, his triadic-line verse is very different from his verse in (usually short-line) tercets. They differ, most importantly, in how they are apprehended in

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reading. Stanzas strike a reader as neat, closed units; stepped triads grouped in paragraphs give an appearance of running on continuously. To rearrange a passage of triadic-line verse into tercets is to change its character as verse by changing how it is apprehended in reading. Thus, the following is *not* a passage of "The Pink Locust," though the wording and the placement of divisions is the same as in Williams' poem (divisions between steps have been replaced by line-divisions, divisions between triads by stanza-divisions):

> I'm persistent as the pink locust,
> once admitted
> to the garden,
>
> you will not easily get rid of it.
> Tear it from the ground,
> if one hair-thin rootlet
>
> remain
> it will come again.
> It is
>
> flattering to think of myself
> so. It is also
> laughable.
>
> A modest flower,
> resembling a pink sweet-pea,
> but you cannot help
>
> but admire it
> until its habits
> become known.
> (*CP2*, pp. 299–300)

Not only the overall impression created by the appearance of the text on the page, but the experience of reading is altered—line- and, especially, stanza-divisions obtrude much more forcibly than the step- and triad-divisions of the triadic-line verse.

The rearrangement above, in its striking contrast to Williams' actual triadic-line arrangement, draws our attention also to the third significant visual aspect of the triadic-line verse: despite the fact that, especially in *Journey to Love*, the individual steps tend to be short (many under six syllables), the appearance on the page is of long lines. The appearance of long lines suggests, by convention, greater seriousness of subject and elevation of tone than the appearance of short lines. By and large, the subjects and tone of Williams' poems in triadic-line verse meet the expectations aroused by their format. Where the subjects are

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homely and/or the tone light, however, we may feel an incongruity. In such cases, subject and/or tone are incongruous with the visual appearance of the verse on the page and with its movement as well.

The Decorum of the Triadic-Line Verse

What Williams thought of the sonnet—that all sonnets say the same thing—seems to hold as well for his own triadic-line verse. The relatively smooth, stately movement that results from a grammar of complete, often complex sentences divided (for the most part) into intonation units, together with the appearance of long lines, seems most suitable to a meditative, especially an elegiac, poem of some length. The triadic line is indeed, as Cushman has proposed, a "modern elegiac format"[37] and not only an elegiac *format*, but an elegiac rhythmic *form*.

When used for one of the short vignettes or epiphanies of everyday life so characteristic of Williams' work at every period but this, the triadic line seems inappropriately ponderous. "The Artist" in *The Desert Music* and "A Negro Woman," which opens *Journey to Love*, are two such epiphanies. While the latter falls into the sentimentality on which Williams' late poetry often verges, the former has the sharpness of observation and cleanness of rendering that typically distinguish the short lyrics of Williams' work from the late Teens through the Forties. If we rearrange this text into tercets, with line-divisions in the places of step-divisions and stanza-breaks in the places of triad-divisions, the result will resemble, except in its relative regularity of movement, Williams' stanzaic lyrics of the Thirties:

Mr. T.
bareheaded
in a soiled undershirt

his hair standing out
on all sides
stood on his toes

heels together
arms gracefully
for the moment

curled above his head.
Then he whirled about
bounded

into the air
and with an *entrechat*

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perfectly achieved

completed the figure.
My mother
taken by surprise

where she sat
in her invalid's chair
was left speechless.

Bravo! she cried at last
and clapped her hands.
The man's wife

came from the kitchen:
What goes on here? she said.
But the show was over.
(*CP2*, pp. 267–68)

Our change of format gives the poem a less presumptuous appearance, as the association of short lines in tercets is with light or "low" verse. In addition, because stanza-divisions are stronger visual interruptions than the swing back to the left margin as one goes from the end of one triad to the beginning of the next, the stanzaic arrangement gives the text a more percussive movement than it has in Williams' triadic-line arrangement. In our arrangement, the stanza-divisions interrupting the sentence "Then he whirled about . . . completed the figure" may give a reader a seemingly kinesthetic experience akin to that of Mr. T., leaping into the air and briefly suspended there, or of his audience. This sort of effect is common in Williams' short-line free-verse lyrics. In the triadic-line arrangement, however, the same enjambment has a very different effect—making one triad flow over into the next, with no particular tension.

If the form of the variable foot in the format of the stepped triadic line seems unsuitable to the everyday material and presentational treatment of the sort of short lyric most characteristic of Williams' earlier mature poetry, it is quite perfectly adapted to the meditative mode he seems to have discovered at the same time as the variable foot. It is not only in versification that the "descent" passage constitutes a new direction for Williams. The replacement of literal detail by metaphor and of presentation by reflection are equally new. Where the new versification is most successful, it is in conjunction with a meditation in metaphoric language, typically with an elegiac tone.

"Asphodel, that Greeny Flower" certainly represents the culmination of Williams' work in the triadic line. A sustained meditation,

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dominated by the theme of time, in metaphoric language, elegiac in tone, it fully realizes the potential of the form. But "Asphodel" is a long poem, and not surprisingly, its form does not have the same inevitability everywhere. A long poem entails some proportion of relatively prosaic or, in Stevens' term (so objectionable to Williams), "antipoetic" material,[38] and the rhythm and appearance of the triadic-line verse are more suited to "poetic" subject matter. Sustained narrative or descriptive material is uncongenial to the form, as we may feel when we read the extended passage about the subway episode in Book Three:

> . . . I saw another man
> yesterday
> in the subway.
> I was on my way uptown
> to a meeting.
> He kept looking at me
> and I at him:
> He had a worn knobbed stick
> between his knees
> suitable
> to keep off dogs,
> a man of perhaps forty.
> He wore a beard
> parted in the middle,
> a black beard,
> and a hat,
> a brown felt hat
> lighter than
> his skin . . . .
>
> (*CP2*, pp. 327–28)

The search that culminated in the discovery of the variable foot and the triadic line was avowedly a search for a form or measure that could hold more material than traditional metrical forms. Ironically, however, the versatile blank-verse line can carry such a weight of workaday material better than Williams' triadic line. The triadic line, with its relatively uniform smoothness of rhythm is not such a jack-of-all-trades. Its best use in a long poem, with various sorts of material, is in combination with other verse forms, as Williams uses it in *Paterson V*.

[1] See Williams' letter to Thirlwall, *Selected Letters*, ed. John C. Thirlwall (New York: New Directions, 1957), p. 334, and Paul Mariani, *William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), p. 689, for views of this phase, at its beginning and at its end, respectively.

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[2] Works cited in this review of interpretations of the variable foot are the following: Denis Donoghue, "For a Redeeming Language," *Twentieth Century*, 163 (1958), 532-42, rpt. in *William Carlos Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. J. Hillis Miller (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966); A. Kingsley Weatherhead, *The Edge of the Image: Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, and Some Other Poets* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1967); James E. Breslin, *William Carlos Williams: An American Artist* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), p. 226; Robert Duncan, "A Critical Difference of View," *Stony Brook*, 3/4 (1969), 360-63; James Story Hedges, "William Carlos Williams' Language about Language," diss. Univ. of Nebraska, 1971; Mary Ellen Solt, "William Carlos Williams: Idiom and Structure," *Massachusetts Review*, 3 (1962), 304-18; Marc Hofstadter, "A Different Speech: William Carlos Williams' Later Poetry," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 23 (1977), 451-66; Paul Goodman, "Between the Flash and the Thunderstroke," rev. of *Journey to Love, Poetry*, 87 (1956), 366–70; Linda Welshimer Wagner, *The Poems of William Carlos Williams* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1964); Karl Shapiro, "William Carlos Williams: The True Contemporary," *In Defense of Ignorance* (New York: Random House, 1960); Marjorie Perloff, " 'To Give a Design': Williams and the Visualization of Poetry," *William Carlos Williams: Man and Poet*, ed. Carroll F. Terrell (Orono, Me.: National Poetry Foundation, 1983), p. 101; Henry M. Sayre, *The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1983); Stephen Cushman, *William Carlos Williams and the Meanings of Measure* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1985); J. Hillis Miller, "William Carlos Williams," *Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth Century Writers* (1965; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1969), p. 336; James Guimond, *The Art of William Carlos Williams: A Discovery and Possession of America* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1968), p. 230.

[3] Emily Mitchell Wallace, "A Musing in the Highlands and Valleys: The Poetry of Gratwick Farm," *William Carlos Williams Review*, 8 (1982), 30.

[4] Kenneth L. Pike, *The Intonation of American English*, Univ. of Michigan Publications: Linguistics, I (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1956), p. 34.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[6] Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen, *An Introduction to English Prosody* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), pp. 73–75.

[7] David Crystal, *The English Tone of Voice: Essays in Intonation, Prosody, and Paralanguage* (London: Edward Arnold, 1975), p. 11.

[8] Gillian Brown, Karen L. Currie, and Joanne Kenworthy, *Questions of Intonation* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), pp. 44 and 47.

[9] Bengt Altenberg, *Prosodic Patterns in Spoken English: Studies in the Correlation between Prosody and Grammar to Text-to-Speech Conversion*, Lund Studies in English, 76 (Lund, Sweden: Lund Univ. Press, 1987), p. 19.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

[11] Couper-Kuhlen, *An Introduction to English Prosody*, p. 153.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[13] Alan Cruttenden, *Intonation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), p. 42.

[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 37 and 39.

[15] Crystal, *The English Tone of Voice*, p. 22.

[16] The two versions appear in *CP2*, pp. 490–91, *n.* 81, and p. 271, respectively.

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[17] This may be a later version of a handwritten essay on "English Speech Rhythms" submitted (unsuccessfully) to Harriet Monroe of *Poetry* in 1913. Mike Weaver has quite reasonably described it as "in some respects [Williams'] clearest statement on 'measure,' although he did not use the word then" (*William Carlos Williams: The American Background* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1971], p. 82).

[18] Quoted in Weaver, *William Carlos Williams*, pp. 82–83.

[19] Thom Gunn, "William Carlos Williams," *Encounter*, 25 (1965), 74.

[20] Kenneth Rexroth, "A Poet Sums Up," rev. of *The Desert Music*, *New York Times Book Review*, 28 Mar. 1954, p. 5.

[21] This is not to say that Williams' counting of intonation units rather than syllables and stresses absolutely determined the rhythm of his verse and removed the possibility of all rhythmic variation. Far from it. As Richard Cureton makes clear in a review-essay on Cushman's book, intonational units represent only one level of rhythmic grouping in a text; readers "chunk" texts into equivalent units at several lower and many higher levels (rev. of *William Carlos Williams and the Meanings of Measure*, *William Carlos Williams Review*, 12, No. 2 [1986], 38). Interestingly, Williams himself seems to have been consciously aware of the multilevel nature of rhythm, for he spoke of rhythm using imagery that conveys this aspect: "Each piece of work, rhythmic in whole, is... in essence an assembly of tides, waves, ripples—in short, of greater and lesser rhythmic particles regularly repeated or destroyed" (quoted in Weaver, *William Carlos Williams*, p. 82).

[22] Stanley Koehler, "The Art of Poetry VI: William Carlos Williams," *Paris Review*, 8 (1964), 110-51; rpt. *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews* (New York: Viking, 1967), p. 11.

[23] Bengt Altenberg did find, in the partly scripted talk that he analyzed, one-word tone-units including "certain clause-initiators, especially *and* and *because*" (pp. 39–40), and one instance of a subject complement clause in which the tone-unit break occurred after, rather than before, the subordinator *that* (*Prosodic Patterns in Spoken English*, p. 62).

[24] See my "Arbitrary Form in Poetry and the Poetic Function of Language," *In Memory of Roman Jakobson: Papers from the 1984 Mid-America Linguistics Conference*, ed. Gilbert Youmans and Donald M. Lance (Columbia, Mo.: Univ. of Missouri-Columbia, 1985), pp. 121–34.

[25] In 1962 Williams used the term "classical" in expressing his dissatisfaction with the versification of "The Orchestra," saying to Stanley Koehler, "It's not successful. It would be classical if it had the proper division of lines" (Koehler, "The Art of Poetry VI," p. 11).

[26] Both these deviant line-divisions came before items with high lexical content—one of the two kinds of places where Cruttenden finds pauses to occur *not* as markers of intonation-unit boundaries.

[27] Cushman, *William Carlos Williams and the Meanings of Measure*, p. 37.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 85.

[29] Sayre, *The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams*, p. 87.

[30] Cushman, *William Carlos Williams and the Meanings of Measure*, p. 79 and 84.

[31] Sayre, *The visual Text of William Carlos Williams*, p. 88.

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[32] Cushman, *William Carlos Williams and the Meanings of Measure*, p. 88 (emphasis added).
[33] Altenberg, *Prosodic Patterns in Spoken English*, p. 27.
[34] Perloff, " 'To Give a Design,' " p. 182.
[35] Sayre, *The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams*, pp. 84–85.
[36] Paul Fussell, Jr., *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 135.
[37] Cushman, *William Carlos Williams and the Meanings of Measure*, p. 92.
[38] See Mariani, *William Carlos Williams*, pp. 339–40.

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Williams' Last Decade: Bridging the Impasse

Christopher MacGowan

In the 1950s William Carlos Williams' poetics underwent two important changes: in 1951-52 taking up the triadic descending form that characterizes most of the poems in his collections *The Desert Music* (1954) and *Journey to Love* (1955), and then in 1956-58, away from that form toward the sparer, more concrete poems that make up most of *Pictures from Brueghel* (1962).

Williams placed "The Descent" as the first poem of *The Desert Music* in order, as he explained to James Laughlin, to reveal "the train of thought which induced the present format of my poems" (*CP2* p. 486). But the arrangement of *Pictures from Brueghel* offers no such assistance to understanding the second development. Two key transition poems appear separately late in the book, and Williams did not collect many of the other poems from the years 1956–58. Viewed along with the two transition poems that are included in the collection, "The High Bridge Above the Tagus River at Toledo" and "Tapiola," the uncollected poems reveal something of Williams' artistic and personal struggle to move on from his reflective and memory-oriented triadic-line poems toward a poetic concerned with dramatizing a much more immediate engagement with the material world of objects.

Part of what these poems reveal is that Williams returned to a strategy posited but largely discarded in his 1951 poem "The Desert Music." Williams composed the poem, and read it at Harvard in June, just weeks after his first serious stroke in March—responding to a commission undertaken before his illness. Many critics have pointed to the ways in which the music motif is developed in the poem. The "protecting music" (*CP2*, p. 284) that the poet discovers cloaking the

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ragged, shapeless figure encountered on the International Bridge, and that allows the poet to reaffirm his sense of personal and literary identity—"I *am* a poet! I am. I am" (*CP2*, p. 284)—clearly parallels Williams' sense of himself as a now physically and mentally crippled figure at risk of losing both parts of this identity. The poem celebrates the discovery of a creative source that will allow the poet to keep writing:

> Now the music volleys through as in
> a lonely moment I hear it. Now it is all
> about me. The dance! The verb detaches itself
> seeking to become articulate .
> (*CP2*, p. 284)

But the writing of the poems in *The Desert Music* and *Journey to Love* did not immediately follow this climactic reaffirmation. Williams was overtaken by a period of severe depression and by an uncertainty as to the future direction of his poetics. His only other poem written in 1951 is a short poem, "December," commissioned for the Christmas Annual of a pharmacy company:

> White rose your sea shell
> petals falling
> fill the world of
> death aflame
>
> Burn aromatically!
> singing bright eyed
> silver bird
> of fire. Phoenix!
>
> it is you! Beat the air
> of ice! Mend
> the glass fallen
> shattered to the ground.
> (*CP2*, p. 236)

In the circumstances, the exclamation marks accompanying the evocation of winter sparkle in the poem betray more of a plea for recovery and reintegration than the confident assertion of a command.

In March 1952 Williams told Robert Lowell: "I haven't written a poem in a year" (*CP2*, p. 486). Although his depression continued for another twelve months, within six months of the letter to Lowell his poetic uncertainty had ended. Williams told Robert Creeley in October 1953 "in the past year I have written ten or twelve poems along a new line stressing the importance of measure" (*CP2*, p. 486). As a number of Williams scholars have noted, the introspection and self-analysis

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brought on by the poet's stroke and his psychiatric treatment, and the physical limitations now imposed upon his life, make almost inevitable the reflective tone of the 1952–55 poems and the central role that memory plays in them. Consequently, the place of "The Desert Music" in the thematic and poetic strategies that inform the triadic-line poems is not as central as the exuberant reassertion of identity and purpose at the conclusion of the 1951 poem would have suggested. In fact, Williams told Edith Heal in 1957 that "the other poems in *Desert Music* are more important than the title poem because they consciously use what I had discovered" (*IWWP*, p. 89).

Interestingly, the climactic moment of discovery upon encountering the shapeless mass in "The Desert Music" is a three-step line:

> What's that?
>
> Oh, come on.
> But what's THAT?
> the music! the
> *music!* as when Casals struck
> and held a deep cello tone
> and I am speechless.
> (*CP2*, pp. 283–84)

So too is the poet's earlier, initial perception of the ragged, shapeless figure:

> on the very walk itself
> Is it alive?
> —neither a head,
> legs nor arms!
> (*CP2*, p. 273)

But clearly—as Williams often pointed out, and as his placing of the poem in *The Desert Music* affirms—"The Descent," taken from Book Two of *Paterson*, is much more a thematic and structural source of the triadic line, with its theme of descent and renewal, and the centrality to this movement of memory and love, than anything in "The Desert Music." But when Williams started to become dissatisfied with the triadic-line form after 1955, his poems of the next couple of years return to themes and strategies implicit in what the poem terms elsewhere "a music of survival" (*CP2*, p. 275): the exuberant assertion of identity, the motif of music, and the increased intensity of encounter with the object world—an intensity that leaves "speechless" the discursive poet of the triadic-line poems, and lets the encounter project its own "music."

As early as 1954 Williams told John Thirlwall in connection with

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"View by Color Photography on a Commercial Calendar" that he felt that "the vein of poetry welling strong with 'Of Asphodel' is petering out" (*CP2*, p. 494). "Something / has come to an end here," that poem concludes, "it has been accomplished" (*CP2*, p. 291). In 1955 he told Cid Corman that the triadic lines now struck him as "forced."[1] But in the middle of 1957 he told Corman he was still looking for "something more comprehensive" to take the place of "my arbitrary division of the line into my recent triple division" (*CP2*, pp. 496–97). "The Turtle" and "The Gift" of 1956 are both written in the triadic form, as are large sections of *Paterson V*.

A central reason for Williams' difficulty was an understandable reluctance to give up a form which had earlier saved him both poetically and psychologically. This personal dimension to the triadic-line poems is often evident in their subject matter, but Williams made the connection explicit in some remarks introducing "Shadows" and the "Coda" to "Asphodel, that Greeny Flower" during a reading at UCLA on June 1, 1955. After commenting that he would probably continue to use the triadic line for the rest of his life, and linking the form—as he does frequently elsewhere—to ideas of relativity, the variable foot, and differences between English and American speech, Williams starts to follow an apparently extemporaneous train of thought:

> Sometimes the artist has, in using a mode or a category which can be experimented with, has an advantage over the physicist who has no such advantage. In a dialectical method which . . . literature implies, we can experiment without causing much harm except to ourselves critically—but it is the field which is open to the intelligence. If you propose a dialectical experiment it may reach places in an individual's life, moral, perhaps intellectual, which may have an effect of freeing him from being caught in psychological impasses. It is very necessary to free the individual as the growth of psychiatry has demonstrated to us. We are caught sometimes in impasses in our intellectual life and if you can use a poem or a construction, a literary construction, to free you from some implied impasse in your lives, moral or intellectual, by seeing the variable foot is a way—it breaks through—it gives you a chance to experiment with yourself—[2]

The comments are marked with hesitations—Williams' strokes had hampered his ability to speak in public—and end abruptly as he admonishes himself for being "tiresome."

Characteristically of the triadic-line poems, both "Shadows" and the "Coda" to "Asphodel" center upon contact with the object world by an imagination infused with the energy of memory, the long descending

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line reflecting the central role of discursive reflection in this process. Against a threatening, powerful external world the poet sets the stabilizing force of such an imagination.

"Shadows" begins with a strategy that is then rejected as inadequate—presenting atmospheric lighting conducive to a "poetic figure" that takes "for granted" the surface world "on which the cricket trills":

shadows cast by the street light
under the stars,
the head is tilted back,
the long shadow of the legs
presumes a world
taken for granted
on which the cricket trills.
The hollows of the eyes
are unpeopled.
Right and left
climb the ladders of night
as dawn races
to put out the stars.
(*CP2*, p. 308)

This "unpeopled" balance of the poetic imagination, the object and the larger world beyond, is a stability of tired metaphor merely, and one which concedes final power to the force of the external—to "dawn." However, "That / is the poetic figure" the poet immediately declares, and the poem finally asserts a perspective that instead of seeing the limitations of the moment in terms of a posited balance between the power of the external infinite and the memory of poetic tropes, places the moment against the power of memory (here characterized chiefly by smell) to transform the significance of the individual "instant / trivial as it is." For that instant:

is all we have
unless—unless
things the imagination feeds upon,
the scent of the rose,
startle us anew.
(*CP2*, p. 310)

"Burn aromatically!" Williams demands of the Phoenix in "December," looking for a strategy of reintegration, and "it is as if / a sweet-scented flower / were poised / and for me did open" (*CP2*, p. 336) he writes of the recovered sensory world (the richly inclusive antecedent of "it" in this line) revealed by the memory of his marriage vows in the "Coda."

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In "Asphodel, that Greeny Flower," as has often been noted, the power of memory as released by the imagination is set against the present trouble of the love the poem seeks to alleviate. The first three sections of the poem are infused with allusions to private memories shared by the poet and his wife. The "Coda" makes more universal the largely personal focus of these three sections, making explicit Williams' larger theme of the potential of stored experience from the past to transform the possibilities of the present. He presents this fuller sense of a rediscovered past—the happiness of the marriage taken as a whole—against a perspective of the present limited by being conditioned by the recent, immediate troubles of the marriage. And he confirms in the "Coda" the poem's setting the perspective of the larger past—represented in the poem by, for example, the elevated formal tone and the references to literature of other ages and other European achievements in various arts—against the particular troubles of *this* marriage, and the immediate expression of this poem as it seeks to articulate and transcend those troubles. This latter synthesis comes to a climax in the "Coda"'s triadic transformation of a line linked to both Spenser and T. S. Eliot—the power of rediscovered memory including and asserting itself over both a "tradition" and an attitude toward a tradition, *within* a tradition of celebrating marriage:

> All the pomp and ceremony
> of weddings,
> "Sweet Thames, run softly
> till I end
> my song,"—
> are of an equal sort.
> (*CP2*, p. 236)

Williams' comment to Cid Corman in November 1955 that the triadic line now struck him as "overdone, artificial, archaic—smacking of Spencer [sic]"[3] is a telling example of the lack of confidence he had come to have in the transforming power of the imaginative encounter represented by the form. The line division and formal tone had clearly earlier represented to him a solution to "the problem" of reconciling old and new posited by one of the first triadic poems, titled "The Problem,"—that was not included in *The Desert Music*. The poem begins:

> How to fit
> an old brownstone church
> among a group
> of modern office buildings:

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The feat stands,
so that the argument
must be after the fact.
We can learn from it
how—
if it is not too late—
to conduct
our lives.

(*CP2*, p. 239)

Thus, in the "Coda" to "Asphodel," as in "Shadows" and the other triadic-line poems, the power of an imagination infused with memory triumphs over the power of what is imposed from outside, in particular the double-edged force of time—the unrelenting limitation of the "instant," and the inevitable physical degeneration that extended time produces—such as the "thunderstroke" of Williams' heart attacks. Man's failure to find a balance between his acquired knowledge, the creative force of imagination, and an unstable and unrelentingly dangerous external world—figured in "Asphodel" by the emergence of the hydrogen bomb—can be transcended by perceiving the current moment with clarity through the all-inclusive "light" that is a central synthesizing motif of these forces in the poem.

Williams' remarks at the UCLA reading, and the two poems he read as examples of the triadic form, confirm the importance of the triadic-line poems to the battle with his own intellectual and psychological "impasse" in 1951–52. In the previously uncollected "The Wrong Door" from 1952, he captures the words of a speaker with a similar problem, but the wrong solution:

Gi' me a reefer, Lawd
cause I wan' to think different
I wan' to think
all around this subject

I wan' to think
I wan' to think where I is
an' I want to think my way out
of where I is by a new door

(*CP2*, p. 238)

The "door"—as the theme of "Asphodel" makes clear—will be opened by what Williams terms "the shock / of love" toward the end of a 1953 poem written for his psychologist, and typed himself to demonstrate recovery from another impasse—physical control of his hands:

Useless to knock

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now, the door
will not open—
save only
at the shock
of love,
to deliver him
from that block,
unlock
his heart and
set it beating again:
(*CP2*, p. 241)

"Every man / is his own clock" the poem begins, emphasizing again—along with the title, "The Clock of the Years"—Williams' central concern in these poems with battling time.

The new impasse of the 1955–57 years is characterized by Williams' need to develop his poetics beyond the triadic line—that he now felt made too much of a concession to the past and to the place of memory in the imagination's confrontation with the world—while at the same time retaining the formal advances he felt he had discovered in his recent poetry. He felt he needed to retain the central qualities of a formal and tonal synthesis that was clearly an important personal foundation of intellectual and psychological confidence from which to face the challenges of crippling strokes, impending death, and the need to keep writing.

The uncollected poems of 1955–58 reveal a number of strategies behind Williams' attempt to reconcile his conflicting needs. Some continuity comes from his continuing to talk of the "variable foot" and of the difference between American and English speech. The 1956 "To Flossie" merely omits the third line of the triad. Then, as in the transition years of 1938–41, when he struggled to discover a workable form to begin *Paterson*, Williams again turned to translation—a way to encounter the concreteness of language itself. Williams had told Nicolas Calas in 1940, in connection with all his translations from Calas' French, "If I do original work all well and good. But if I can say it (the matter of form I mean) by translating the work of others that also is valuable. What difference does it make?" (*CP2*, pp. 451–52). In 1955 Williams translated Octavio Paz's "Hymn Among the Ruins," and later a large number of contemporary Spanish poems, some of which remain unpublished.[4] And, as with the periods of uncertainty in both 1938–41 and 1951–52, Williams concentrated on the multiple forms that make up *Paterson*—although in 1951 the poem had turned, of course, into the triadic line "Asphodel, that Greeny Flower."

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In addition, also as in 1938–41—particularly in the "Detail and Parody for the poem Paterson" sequence—and in 1952 in "The Wrong Door," he *listened* to the speech around him and experimented with its formal arrangement. The short 1957 poem "This is Pioneer Weather" concerns a memory, but one the concrete presentation of which in the language of the speaker, and the concentrated lineation of Williams' record of it, gives the memory an immediacy absent in many of the 1952–55 poems:

> Me, go to Florida!
> Ha ha!
> At Northfield when
> we were girls
>
> we used to take
> the trays
> we
> had in the kitchen
>
> and sit on them
> Wow!
> what a thrill!
> in the field
>
> back of the
> school!
> down hill screaming
> our heads off!
>
> (*CP2*, p. 347)

The poem's central action is a "descent" of altogether another kind than the meditative poem that begins *The Desert Music*. The poem's immediacy is central to its positing of survival despite the hostile climate—to its rejecting the concession to retirement and age implied in the suggestion to go to Florida

These years are also marked by some poems that directly treat objects as a way to bring more immediacy into the dramatized engagement with the external world. But the objects retain qualities that allow the continued inclusion of such themes as the role of time and the battle for survival. The 1957 "Portrait of a Woman at her Bath" celebrates the vitality of a 3,000-year-old pre-Columbian figure, "An Old Fashioned German Christmas Card" records four struggling "musicians / trudging / the snow / / between villages in / the cold" (*CP2*, p. 354), "The Loving Dexterity" and "At the Brink of Winter" set their central, focused actions against nature's enduring cycles as revealed in a garden.

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The degree of foregrounding of object or action in these poems is clear when they are set against the treatment of the ostensible subject in such triadic poems as "A Negro Woman," "The Yellow Flower," "View by Color Photography on a Commercial Calendar," and "The Sparrow." These objects are finally transformed into the transcendent symbols more clearly proclaimed in such titles as "The Host" and "Deep Religious Faith." In "The Sparrow," for example, the bird is claimed as embracing "a poetic truth," and is finally subsumed into the reflecting self that dedicates the poem to his father dead thirty-five years: "This was I, / a sparrow" (*CP2*, p. 295). An apparent exception is the foregrounded entrechat and response that are the subject of "The Artist," but here the triadic line still emphasizes the voice of the tale-teller at some cost to the immediacy of the incident's detail—Williams' mother is far less a presence in this poem, for example, than in the poems centered on her in the late 1940s.

"The High Bridge Above the Tagus River at Toledo" and "Tapiola" are two key transition poems of the middle 1950s, both subsequently collected in *Pictures from Brueghel*. The two poems illuminate Williams' shift away from the folding of the moment of engagement into an all-inclusive transformation of memory, and toward allowing the kind of centrality granted the object in poems such as "This is Pioneer Weather" and "Portrait of a Woman at her Bath." Both "The High Bridge Above the Tagus River at Toledo" and "Tapiola" retain versions of the long line that in its triple division had earlier allowed Williams to "break through" the impasse imposed by the limitations of his own limited psychological and physical moment—and both center thematically upon memory and survival. Yet both are organized around a much looser line than the triadic structure—while both, to judge from the number of revised drafts of both poems extant—exhibit Williams' uncertainty as to how to shape a poem that seeks to retain the strengths of the long line while moving it away from the triadic form.

The 1956 "The High Bridge Above the Tagus River at Toledo" was written first, and is more rooted in the emotional and formal texture of the triadic-line poems. The poem concerns an incident from Williams' visit to Spain in 1910 at the age of twenty-seven. The remembered incident supplies a still potent image for the poet's imagination, shaping a poetic that parallels both the act of remembering and the directed movement of the sheep across the bridge. The poem concludes:

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The whole flock, the shepherd and the dogs, were covered
with dust
as if they had been all day long on the road. the pace
of the
sheep, slow in the mass,
governed the man and the dogs. They were approaching the
city
at nightfall, the long journey completed.

In old age they walk in the old man's dreams and still walk
in his dreams, peacefully continuing in his verse
forever.

(*CP2*, p. 424)

Here the close observation of the remembered moment is much more to the fore than in most of the triadic-line poems. While describing the tired shepherd and dogs "approaching the city / at nightfall, the long journey completed" is also a way for Williams to write about his own sense of approaching death; nevertheless, youth and old age, memory and the present's reliving of it come together formally and thematically in a poem shaped not by a reflecting voice or the kind of static synthesizing motif discovered by a transcendent all-inclusive memory but by the moving contour of the remembered particulars. The assertion of timelessness that concludes the poem locates the renewed power of the particular in memory, and the power of the particular encounter is diffused into the power of "dreams," but the poet's focus on his sensory encounter with the object is striking in comparison to most of the triadic-line poems. The drafts of this poem at Yale (cataloged as Za 192) reveal Williams' uncertainty, having opened up the triadic form, as to how to organize his line. His revisions of the opening stanza—shaping his renewed encounter with the objects that are words—are indicative of his work on the drafts as a whole. An early draft begins with an echo of the triadic form:

XXX a young man, alone, on the bridge which was too narrow
to allow the sheep
XXX to pass easily XXXXXXXXXXX followed
XXXXXXXXXXXX
by the lean and enormous dogs
whose hind legs worked
slowly
on cogs
I did not speak the language

The rest of this draft is arranged in sentence blocks around observed particulars—the organization of the stanzas by these particulars being

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central to the poem from the start. Another, probably later, version continues to experiment with spacing shifts in relation to the left margin:

> A young man, alone, on the high bridge which was too
> narrow to allow the sheep to pass easily
> the lean enormous dogs whose hind legs worked on cogs.
> He didn't speak the language

This arrangement produces an inverse of the triadic stanza, while the rest of the draft experiments with different line/margin spacing.

Later drafts settle on the final format of the piece, retaining the periodic return to the left margin of the triadic form, retaining the long line illustrative of the reflective tone of those poems, but avoiding the descending structure associated with the all-inclusive transformation of memory. Thus in the final version the lines between the left hand returns are organized into identical blocks:

> A young man, alone, on the high bridge over the Tagus which
> was too narrow to allow the sheep driven by the lean,
> enormous dogs whose hind legs worked slowly on cogs
> to pass easily . . .
> (he didn't speak the language)
>
> Pressed against the parapet either side by the crowding
> sheep,
> the relentless pressure of the dogs communicated
> itself to him also
> above the waters in the gorge below.
> (*CP2*, p. 423)

The poem's theme and structure represent a tentative compromise with the necessity to move on from the 1952–55 poems, but as such the poem itself is a "bridge"—as necessary to overcome an impasse as had been the discovery on the bridge celebrated in "The Desert Music." Both "bridges," interestingly, are associated with the Spanish side of Williams' heritage—the creative, iconoclastic side in his personal racial mythology. The International Bridge literally links an Anglo-Saxon with a Spanish culture, and the High Bridge—in Spain itself—links the Anglo-Saxon and Spanish sides of the poet in the interconnectedness of the poem's temporal fusion.

"Tapiola," first published the following year, 1957, represents a further move toward the more concrete poems of the final years, but similarly caused Williams continuing organizational problems. Williams told Gilbert Sorrentino in October that this poem—"the only serious poem I have written in months"—is "a triumphant lament for the great

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Finnish composer Sibelius who has just died." He insisted that although the poem "is not in the triple division I used in Journey to Love—essentially it follows that pattern, the measure can be counted similarly," later commenting that the difference in measure was related to Sibelius' own musical measure (*CP2*, p. 514). Thus the object that is the focus of the poem shapes its structure, not the process of reflective memory—although Williams did not yet want to leave the triadic line too far behind.

This poem had been preceded in 1956 and 1957 by three poems centrally concerned with music: "Reverie and Invocation," a poem focused on memory, but formally shaped by its purpose—to be set to music as part of the seventy-fifth anniversary celebrations of the incorporation of Rutherford; "Ballad," in quatrains, concerning the contentment music can bring a musician, and the consequent harmony of family life—a too complacently asserted synthesis, as Williams recognized in terming the poem "second rate" (*CP2*, p. 498); and the only one of the three Williams collected, the three "Calypsos" of 1957, their witty repetitions and concentrated lineation an experiment in reproducing rhythmically that musical beat.

"Tapiola" is a more serious matter—filled with the urgency of music as "survival," and thus akin to the confrontation on the International Bridge and the dogged trudging of the four musicians in "An Old Fashioned German Christmas Card"—and very different from the abstractions of the 1952 triadic form "The Orchestra." *Tapiola*, despite turning out to be Sibelius' last major work, marked his advance into new areas of formal exploration. The "music of survival" played in the poem "Tapiola" is, of course, that of both Williams and Sibelius—both asserting the power of "composition" against external threat. As Mariani points out, Williams puts Sibelius into his own attic room at 9 Ridge Road. The shifts in various drafts between second- and third-person references to the composer illustrate Williams' uncertainty about the degree of distance he wants to put between himself and his subject. The poem begins:

> He is no more dead than Finland herself is dead
> under the blows of the mass-man who threatened
> to destroy her until she felled her forests
> about his head, ensnaring him. But, children, you
> underestimated the power in your own song *Finlandia!*
> It holds you up but no more so than has he I celebrate
> who had heard the icy wind in his ears and defied
> it lovingly with a smile. The power of music,

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> of composition, the placing of sounds together,
> edge against edge, Moussorgsky the half-mad Russian
> had it and Dostoyevsky who knew the soul.
>
> (*CP2*, pp. 434–35)

The Russian musician and writer (Russians always potential revolutionaries for Williams) are further heroic figures battling against the destructive threats of nature to produce a legacy marked by the celebration of time through "The / children . . . decked out in ribbons, bunting and / with flags in their hands to celebrate your birthday!"– and that, like the shepherd and his dogs "continues to live in all our / minds, all of us, forever . . . ." (*CP2*, p. 435) (Early versions of "The High Bridge Above the Tagus River at Toledo" had also stressed the affinity of personal and collective memory and its relationship to survival. One early draft of its closing lines reads: "still walk through my dreams / and will walk through the dreams of the race forever.")

Williams felt dissatisfied with the looseness of "Tapiola," and the second published version of the poem echoes the final arrangement of "The High Bridge Above the Tagus River at Toledo." The shift is both a move away from the triadic pattern Williams had claimed to be echoing in the first version, and a return to a form that had earlier marked a successful "bridge" between it and new possibilities:

> He is no more dead than Finland herself is dead
> under the blows of the mass-man who threatened
> to destroy her
> until she felled her forests about his head ensnaring
> him to his own downfall.
>
> Finlandia! thundered in his ears! Finlandia
> echoed the ears I celebrate have heard the
> icy wind time out of mind lovingly
> and with a smile!
>
> The power of music, of composition, the placing of
> sounds together, edge to edge, Moussorgsky
> the half mad Russian had it, and Dostoyevsky
> who knew the soul of music.
>
> (*CP2*, pp. 514–15)

A version of this poem that Williams did not publish, subtitled "Final Version" but possibly an intermediate draft, abandons this arrangement to carve out stanzas arranged in blocks around individual sentences (*CP2*, pp. 515–16). The exact chronology of the drafts is less important, however, than the parallel of these attempts to pattern a poem concerned with an artist figure striving to defeat the "blows" of an

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external force with Williams' own move toward encountering the object world on the battleground of the more immediate moment—encountering the object, felling the triadic-line forests of his own security to develop a poetic more responsive to the present encounter.

A measure of the direction opened up with the help of a poem such as "Tapiola" is the later "Pictures from Breughel" sequence. In the sequence Williams' present encounter with the objects of Brueghel's art is the thematic focus. Whereas the children—evidence of time's continuing renewal and vitality in the present—joyously celebrate Sibelius' birthday in "Tapiola," and are incorporated into the poem that celebrates the composer, Brueghel, and thus Williams, goes a step further in "Children's Games" in affirming the object's inclusiveness by including the children in the very composition that is itself celebrated. Like the children who have joyously taken over the town, the continuity born of renewed encounter with the material world is part of the fabric of the world itself, and thus part of the fabric of the composition that records it—rather than the continuity being a quality brought by the mind that engages the world.

A number of poems in *Pictures from Brueghel* celebrate striving figures who, like the Sibelius of "Tapiola," struggle against the pressure of the external as the Finns struggled "under the blows of the mass-man." But in the later poems the act of striving—and of survival—becomes not the central focus but a necessary undercurrent of the poet's renewed engagement with the object world in the present moment of his encounter. "The Stone Crock," for example, is as much a poem about loss as any of the triadic-line poems, and as much about time as is "The Clock of the Years." The poem concerns the now long past days of Williams' acquaintance with the artists associated with Alfred Stieglitz—and with the dead photographer himself: "how gentle he / was and / persistent" (*CP2*, p. 405). But here Williams does not just talk about time. The poem's focus remains always the "stoneware crock" of the title. The temporal human quality of Stieglitz' persistence, and that of Dorothy Norman in remembering Stieglitz and Williams through the postcard carrying the photograph of the stoneware, is evoked and celebrated by the immediacy of visual and tactile contact with the object, carefully detailed in the poem:

> In my hand I hold
> a postcard
> addressed to me
> by a lady
>
> Stoneware crock

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salt-glazed
a dandelion embossed
dark blue
(*CP2*, p. 404)

And the "crock" is further described later in the poem, which begins its final stanza emphatically in the present, "Now." An impasse has been overcome; striving has been rewarded, by the "lady" remembering the poet, the poet remembering her and Stieglitz, and by the poet's ability to let memory come into play, work powerfully on his imagination, yet keep its place in the full complexity of his encounter with the object world—and the record of that encounter in his poem.

In one of Williams' last poems, "Heel & Toe to the End," Yuri Gagarin, a countryman of Moussorgsky and Dostoyevsky, goes out to battle with the stars, responding to the threat of the external infinite by going out to meet it:

Gagarin says, in ecstasy,
he could have
gone on forever

he floated
ate and sang
and when he emerged from that

one hundred eight minutes off
the surface of
the earth he was smiling

Then he returned
to take his place
among the rest of us

from all that division and
subtraction a measure
toe and heel

heel and toe he felt
as if he had
been dancing
(*CP2*, p. 436)

The trajectory of the journey that produces his singing and "dancing" moves beyond the inward journey associated with the sources of memory characteristic of the triadic-line poems. The personal significance of the event to the poet is important, but dominates neither the voice nor the detail of the lines. In the earlier "Shadows" the trite poetic metaphor that offered a false strategy to battle the infinite—

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"Right and left / climb the ladders of night / as dawn races / to put out the stars" (*CP2*, p. 308)—is countered by the assertion: "what is not now / will never / be." Nevertheless, the nature of memory is the central focus of the poem. The infinite renewal of memory is what is celebrated, and is probably why the final lines are paraphrased at the conclusion of *Paterson V*. But in "Heel & Toe to the End" Williams dramatizes his engagement with the concrete language of his newspaper ("he read the TIMES out—went upstairs and wrote this" records Thirlwall [*CP2*, p. 516]), and through Gagarin affirms present heroic action—toward "the stars"—in place of the comfort of both poetic cliché and the reservoir of stored experience. It is importantly an *action* that "could have / gone on forever," not, for example, the passive continuation in dreams of the passing of sheep. This song and dance to the "music of survival" is a celebration of the infinite possibilities of renewed encounter with the material world.

[1] Paul Mariani, *William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), p. 689.

[2] William Carlos Williams, Tape of reading at UCLA, June 1, 1955. Department of Special Collections, University of California Library, Los Angeles.

[3] Mariani, *William Carlos Williams*, p. 689.

[4] The Williams collection at the Beinecke Library, Yale University, contains, in addition to the translations Williams published in *New World Writing* and *Evergreen Review*, his versions of Ernesto Sanchez' "Los desvelos," Eugenio Florit's "Conversación a mi padre," Pablo Neruda's "Oda a los calcetines," and a poem by Jorge Andrade translated as "Dictated by the Water."

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Orpheus and Eurydice in the Twentieth Century: Lawrence, H. D., and the Poetics of the Turn

Helen Sword

Even in its earliest known versions, the Orpheus myth encompasses nearly half a dozen archetypically potent situations, and the range of its associations swells with each generation's retellings. In his most positively suggestive roles, Orpheus is celebrated as the mystical priest, founder and patron of the Orphic cult; the consummate poet, whose song can charm trees, stones, and even the dark denizens of the Underworld; and the great romantic hero whose love transcends and, briefly, conquers death. On a less triumphant note, however, he is also remembered as the overambitious quester whose failure to rescue Eurydice has come to symbolize the futility of trying to outwit death. As the dismembered victim of jealous Maenads, he represents, even more ambivalently, both the imperfect mortal whose song has failed to charm and the deathless poet whose music issues even from the lips of his decapitated head. In this final manifestation he becomes, like his Egyptian counterpart Osiris, a physically incoherent being who yet retains all the integrity of identity—thus enacting, as twentieth-century writers as diverse as Cocteau, Anouilh, Rilke, and Blanchot have recognized,[1] the situation, anguished yet articulate, of the modern poet. To a poetic generation frantically scrambling to shore fragments of meaning against its spiritual ruins, Orpheus guarantees, in Walter

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Strauss's analysis, "the possibility of reassembling the shattered fragments" of the fractured self.[2]

Orpheus embodies both the powers of art and the limitations of art—both the possibility of conquering death and the futility of the attempt. It is the very ambivalence of the myth he inhabits that accounts for its tremendous potency. As intercessor between life and death, between humanity and the gods, between "the radiant solar enlightenment of Apollo and the somber subterranean knowledge of Dionysus,"[3] Orpheus is the ultimate go-between, the fallible hero who nonetheless attempts to fuse irreconcilable opposites and to bridge the gap between the possible and the forbidden. His characteristic moment, symbolizing both his success and all his failures, is located in his turn, his enigmatic backward glance at Eurydice: the gesture by which he attempts, and necessarily fails, to embrace the world of light and the world of darkness in a single all-encompassing regard.

From Eurydice's point of view, of course, Orpheus' turn, however admirable and ambitious its motivations, has an unambiguously unpleasant result: she is packed off to the Underworld, refused the chance at life that moments before had been so tantalizingly dangled before her. Bearing none of Orpheus' symbolic baggage, defined and manipulated by his powerful gaze, Eurydice is, comparatively speaking, a mythological nobody. Her only obvious archetypal significance resides in a negative role: that of woman-as-Other, woman-as-death, woman as the "dark continent" that Freud found both so threatening and so irresistible. If, as many scholars believe, the Orpheus/Eurydice myth originally ended with Orpheus' successful completion of his mission, then Eurydice must at one time have personified, like Persephone, rebirth and regeneration: the successful passage from winter into spring and from death into life.[4] But by the time she finds her way into Virgil's *Georgics* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the earliest recorded versions of the myth,[5] Eurydice has already been demoted from a death-defying figure of fertility to an impotent pawn of the powers-that-be, forever relegated—except in such happy-ending revisions of the tale as the operas by Peri, Monteverdi, and Gluck[6]—to the underground realm of darkness and death.

If, for many readers, Eurydice's fate may seem frustrating and unfair, for others it has provided the very secret of her appeal. Rainer Maria Rilke saw Eurydice as the embodiment of feminine mystery, possessing powers of self-fulfillment inaccessible even to her archetypal poet-husband;[7] while Maurice Blanchot, in his 1944 essay "Le Regard d'Orphée," takes the level of abstraction even further by identifying

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Eurydice not as a flesh-and-blood woman, not even as an archetypically representative one, but rather as the nocturnal center at the core of all artistic endeavor: "Eurydice is . . . the greatest extreme that art can attain, she is, beneath a name that conceals her and a veil that covers her, the profoundly obscure point toward which art, desire, death, and night seem to strain. . . ."[8]

Yet as long as Orpheus leaves Eurydice behind in the Underworld, the Orpheus/Eurydice myth must be understood not only as a fable of artistic ambition but also as an account—as Klaus Theweleit has noted in an essay on Gottfried Benn's Orphic pretensions[9]—of deep-seated gender conflict. Writers like Rilke, Benn, and especially Blanchot, reducing Eurydice first to "the eternal feminine," then to a silent Other, and finally to a core of unattainable darkness, only take to its logical extreme a process of abstraction already thousands of years old. Their accounts mask the complex emotional dynamics of the story, replaying, in fact, the very terms of the conflict by doing so: Orpheus' transformation into the paradigmatic modern poet takes place only, so to speak, over Eurydice's dead body.

Modern women writers, penetrating both the literary marketplace and the canon in increasingly large numbers, have used their newfound intellectual clout to reject woman's traditional Eurydicean role as long-suffering wife, abandoned lover, patient muse, and death-filled archetype. But when Eurydice learns to speak, to move, to think for herself—to turn upon Orpheus as he has turned upon her—how does the great poet-lover respond? This essay seeks to explore that question through a twentieth-century case study: the emotionally charged literary relationship of D. H. Lawrence and H. D., two strong-willed writers who not only thematized the Orpheus/Eurydice myth extensively in their writings, but whose own interactions replayed the complex gender dynamics, the turns and returns, and the shifting leader/follower patterns characterizing the myth itself.[10] Their sexual battle, fought out on personal and poetic turf alike, can be regarded as but one representative skirmish in the great war of the sexes that has already left an indelible mark on the literature of our century.[11]

H. D. outlines the terms of the conflict in a central scene of her autobiographical roman-à-clef *Bid Me to Live*, as Rico, a famous writer, offers Julia, the novel's protagonist, some advice on one of her poems:

> "I don't like the second half of the Orpheus sequence as well as the first: Stick to the woman speaking. How can you know what Orpheus feels? It's your part to be woman, the woman vibration, Eurydice should be enough. You can't deal with both."[12]

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Julia, understandably annoyed, rebuts with a reflection on Rico's double standard:

> Rico could write elaborately on the woman mood, describe women to their marrow in his writing; but if she turned round, wrote the Orpheus part of her Orpheus-Eurydice sequence, he snapped back, "Stick to the woman-consciousness, it is the intuitive woman-mood that matters." He was right about that, of course. But if he could enter, so diabolically, into the feelings of women, why should not she enter into the feelings of men? (*BMTL*, p. 62)

Julia's angry question focuses not only on the specific unfairness of Rico's advice, but also on that of the myth her poem evokes. If Rico, as Orphic poet, may fix and penetrate "the woman-consciousness" with his piercing male gaze, why may not she, as Eurydice, also "turn round" and focus her artistic attention upon the thoughts and feelings of a man?

The scene describes, in thinly fictionalized form, the emotional dynamics of H. D.'s brief but turbulent relationship with Lawrence, which began in 1914 and culminated in the 1917 encounters detailed in the novel. If the exchange between Rico and Julia echoes one that actually took place between Lawrence and H. D., then it appears that H. D. heeded Lawrence's advice: her 1916 poem "Eurydice," written at a time when she was regularly exchanging manuscripts with Lawrence, is angry, defiant, and revisionary, but it does indeed "stick to the woman speaking."[13] Playing a willing Eurydice to Lawrence's charismatic Orpheus, H. D. apparently had hoped that her friend and fellow poet could draw her, as Julia is briefly drawn by Rico, out of the emotional hell of her daily wartime life and into "another dimension" of poetic existence (*BMTL*, pp. 68–69). Like the Eurydice of her own poem, she responded not with resignation but with bitterness and anger to what she perceived as his eventual turn against her.[14] Whether or not *Bid Me to Live*, in which Rico first tacitly encourages and then coldly rejects Julia's tentative romantic advances, accurately recounts what "really happened" between Lawrence and H. D., the novel in any case presents events as H. D. later chose to interpret them: clearly she felt that Lawrence, warning her not to pursue him into the terrain of emotional cross-dressing that he himself had so successfully navigated, had betrayed her on personal and artistic grounds alike.

Thus, although it is tempting to contemplate their literary relationship solely through the filter of their physical and emotional interactions—as indeed several critics have seen fit to do[15]—the creative

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give-and-take between Lawrence and H. D. reached well beyond the private sphere of their correspondence and occasional meetings; in fact it played itself out primarily in the unsheltered realm of art, as each grappled publicly, in writing, with the anxiety of the other's influence.[16] H. D.'s interest in Lawrence, to be sure, had more to do with his forceful personality and what she recognized as his symbolic Orpheus/Osiris role than with his actual accomplishments as novelist or poet.[17] In her old age she would list him as one of the seven male "initiators" who, she felt, had most crucially influenced her poetic and personal development;[18] while in a 1916 letter that almost certainly refers to Lawrence she granted him an even more potent role, confiding to John Cournos that "There is a power in this person to kill me":

> I mean literally. For the spiritual vision, his thoughts, his distant passion has given me, I thank God—because vision is of God! I thank God! But . . . there is another side—if he comes too near, I am afraid for myself! I do not mean physically—. . . I mean in a more subtle way.[19]

Lawrence, similarly, looked to H. D. less for poetic influence as such—though he consistently admired and praised her poetry[20]—than for some "more subtle" form of inspiration and initiation. When Cecil Gray, "Cyril Vane" of *Bid Me to Live*, wrote a letter in late 1917 accusing Lawrence of "allowing himself to become the object of a kind of esoteric female cult . . . a Jesus Christ to a regiment of Mary Magdalenes,"[21] Lawrence replied with a defense both of his own role as prophet/messiah and of his "women's" initiatory function:

> As for me and my "women," I know what they are and aren't, and though there is a certain messiness, there is a further reality. Take away the subservience and feet-washing, and the pure understanding between Magdalen and Jesus went deeper than the understanding between the disciples and Jesus, or Jesus and the Bethany women. But Jesus himself was frightened of the knowledge which subsisted between the Magdalen and him, a knowledge deeper than the knowledge of Christianity and "good," deeper than love, anyhow. . . .
>
> It seems to me there is a whole world of knowledge to forsake, a new, deeper, lower one to *entamer*. And your hatred of me, like Frieda's hatred of me, is your cleavage to a world of knowledge and being which you ought to forsake, or die. And my "women," Esther Andrews, Hilda Aldington [H. D.] etc., represent, in an impure and unproud, subservient, cringing, bad fashion, I admit—but represent none the less the threshold of a new world, or underworld, of knowledge and being. . . . The old world must burst, the underworld must be open and whole, new

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> world.—You want an emotional sensuous underworld . . . my "women" want an ecstatic subtly-intellectual underworld, like the Greeks—Orphicism—like Magdalen at her feet-washing—and there you are.[22]

Accepting not only the role of a charismatic Christ-figure, Lawrence paints himself here as Orpheus, descending to that "new, deeper, lower . . . world, or underworld, of knowledge and being" to which H. D., as Magdalen/Eurydice, can, he believes, show the way. For Lawrence, as for Rilke and Blanchot, the Underworld is female: a dangerous but alluring realm where mystery and intuition are privileged over conventional wisdom and reason. Orpheus, as archetypal male poet, descends into that Underworld in hopes of capturing and bringing to utterance all the secrets of the unknown. Whether one interprets his journey in psychoanalytical terms as a descent into the unconscious, or in sexual terms as the descent into the body of the woman—a kind of physical "Harrowing of Hell"[23]—the quest remains, above all, one for mastery: over the Other within, or merely over the Other across the breakfast table.

Like Rilke, who in his 1922 *Sonnets to Orpheus* would laud Orpheus as a successful intercessor between the irreconcilable realms of life and death, Lawrence emphasizes the ambition rather than the danger of the Orphic quest by presenting it, in such early essays as his 1914 *Study of Thomas Hardy*, as an ultimately successful one:

> For a man who dares to look upon, and to venture within the unknown of the female, losing himself, like a man who gives himself to the sea, or a man who enters a primeval, virgin forest, feels, when he returns, the utmost gladness of singing.[24]

At times he implies, to be sure, that the voyage of sexual discovery should be mutual and interactive:

> What is true of men is so of women. If we turn our faces west, towards nightfall and the unknown within the dark embrace of a wife, they turn their faces east, towards the sunrise and the brilliant, bewildering, active embrace of a husband.[25]

Yet by equating femininity with darkness, passivity, and the Will-to-Inertia, while holding men to represent light, action, and the Will-to-Motion,[26] Lawrence establishes a sexual cosmogony in which only the male can claim real credit for creativity, artistic power, and utterance:

> In every creature, the mobility, the law of change, is found exemplified in the male, the stability, the conservatism is found in the female. In woman, man finds his root and establishment.

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> In man, woman finds her exfoliation and florescence. The woman grows downwards, like a root, towards the centre and the darkness and the origin. The man grows upwards, like the stalk, towards discovery and light and utterance.[27]

Lawrence, who often solicited help from women in his own literary endeavors,[28] was willing enough, and indeed deemed it necessary, to employ women as guides to the realm of the unknown. He took care, however, to distance himself from those aspects of femininity that he found undesirable or potentially damaging to his masculine ego. By describing H. D., for instance, as "impure and unproud, subservient, cringing," he was able to suggest that she, despite the potency of her Magdalen/Eurydice role, was nonetheless also "feminine" in all the worst ways, betraying symptoms of an emotional "messiness" with which he wanted nothing to do. As Orpheus, he would gladly follow his Eurydices down to their Underworld; he refused, however, to value too highly their contribution to his quest or to grant them, worse yet, reciprocal access to his own upper world of male privilege. Though Lawrence as Orpheus might emerge from the Underworld in possession of all its secrets—hence his ability to "write elaborately on the woman mood, describe women to their marrow in his writing"—Eurydice was to remain locked in her role of archetypal female, associated, if not with trivial emotionality, then with the mute, inactive otherness of passivity and death.

H. D., writing her poem "Eurydice" in 1916, probably had not read Lawrence's *Study of Thomas Hardy*; though already completed by 1915, the essay was not to see publication until 1936. She was, however, almost certainly familiar with the basic tenets of her friend's gender ideology, and as both her poetry and her later prose attest, she clearly recognized the dangers of the sexual stereotyping that Lawrence's philosophy, like the Orpheus/Eurydice myth itself, sought to universalize and justify. Written during the painful disintegration of her marriage to Richard Aldington, "Eurydice" can be read on the most obvious biographical level as H. D.'s personal cry of rage and despair against an unfaithful husband, also a poet and once a mentor, who has drawn her toward happiness only to turn and reject her:

> So you have swept me back,
> I who could have walked with the live souls
> above the earth,
> I who could have slept among the live flowers
> at last;
>
> so for your arrogance

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and your ruthlessness
I am swept back
where dead lichens drip
dead cinders upon moss of ash . . .[29]

Embedded here too, however, is H. D.'s response to Lawrence, who had told her to "stick to the woman speaking": in other words to remain, like Eurydice herself, in the dark realm of the female, the realm of "the woman vibration." Though H. D. may have bowed to Lawrence's polemic in cutting out the Orpheus section of her poem, she no doubt recognized that his advice itself constituted an Orphic turn, a betrayal of confidence that was at the same time a condemnation. Her Eurydice executes an Orphic turn of her own—or, if you will, a "Eurydicean" turn away from patriarchal convention—when she rejects the familiar myth of Orpheus as the faithful lover whose glance back at his wife signals at once his aspiration and his human imperfection. Orpheus' backward glance, this Eurydice suggests, is more a gesture of greed—"So for your arrogance / and your ruthlessness / I have lost the earth / and the flowers of the earth"—than one of love or even of pure passionate need.

At the same time, H. D. also rejects the image of Eurydice as the passive object of her heroic husband's quest, allowed, while Orpheus charms the Underworld with his music, no creative voice of her own. Decades later, in *Helen in Egypt*, H. D. would confront epic tradition by depicting the restless quest of Helen of Troy—one of Western mythology's most enduring emblems of the woman-as-object—not for bloody heroism but for subjective understanding and spiritual fulfillment. "Eurydice" is only slightly less ambitious: H. D.'s heroine, rather than accepting her fate in silence or lamenting vaguely to the gods,[30] cries out defiantly against all male oppression, offering a manifesto for a feminist poetics appropriating hell—the negative space of literary marginality into which the female poet has been driven—as a source of power:

Against the black
I have more fervour
than you in all the splendour of that place,
against the blackness
and the stark grey
I have more light

. . . . . .

At least I have the flowers of myself,
and my thoughts, no god

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can take that;
I have the fervour of myself for a presence
and my own spirit for light;

and my spirit with its loss
knows this;
though small against the black,
small against the formless rocks,
hell must break before I am lost;

before I am lost,
hell must open like a red rose
for the dead to pass.
(*CP*, pp. 54–55)

Eurydice's determination to reign in hell if she cannot write poetry in heaven is not, perhaps, the most satisfying solution possible to the creative dilemma in which Orpheus has placed her. But it is a courageous one, and the apocalyptic imagery of the final stanza—where hell, in a demonic revision of Robert Burns, is compared to a red rose—suggests that Eurydice's "flowers of myself" are powerful blooms indeed.[31]

If "Eurydice" represents, at least in part, H. D.'s response to Lawrence's Orphic pretensions—to the sexual politics governing his poetic practice—then Lawrence's "Medlars and Sorb Apples" can be read as his turn against her turn: Orpheus' counterresponse to Eurydice's mutiny. The poem, which appears in the 1923 volume *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers*, was written in Italy in 1920, nearly three years after Lawrence's friendship with H. D. had, for reasons that her letters and memoirs only hint at, effectively ended. By this time the Lawrence who wrote "The Crown" and *Study of Thomas Hardy*—essays that, despite their insistence on gender polarity, strongly advocated an emotional and creative alliance between the sexes—was well on the way to becoming a bitter, polemical misogynist, as the complex sexual dynamics of *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* gave way to the woman-bashing, protofascist energies of *Aaron's Rod*, *Kangaroo*, and *The Plumed Serpent*. Numerous explanations have been advanced for the abrupt change in Lawrence's thinking; Cornelia Nixon suggests that it was the fallout of some "private disaster," possibly a guilty brush with homosexuality,[32] while Hilary Simpson argues more broadly that the upheavals produced by the Great War, particularly the political inroads made by feminists, provoked Lawrence's reactionary response.[33] Eurydice's rebellion against Orpheus, in other words, inspired a furious backlash.

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Whatever the cause of the change, Lawrence, who in 1917 named H. D. among the women indicating "the threshold of a new world, or underworld, of knowledge and being," had by 1919 abandoned any belief that the sexes should move toward each other, or that, worse yet, men should follow women anywhere. Instead he reaffirmed a traditional model of male leader and obedient female follower: "Man must either lead or be destroyed. Woman cannot lead."[34] Woman, he insists in such essays as "Fantasia of the Unconscious" and "Education of the People," must remain in the Underworld of otherness: man should "reduce her once more to a naked Eve, and send the apple flying,"[35] driving her "back . . . to the old mindlessness, the old unconsciousness."[36] He roundly condemns the powerful mother-goddess whom he once admired as well as feared: "Woman as the goddess in the machine of the human psyche is a heroine who will drive us, like a female chauffeur, through all the avenues of hell, till she pitches us eventually down the bottomless pit."[37] And in his 1919 "Education of the People," he exhorts men to abandon love, especially mother love:

> Break off the old polarity, the merging into oneness with others, with everything. . . . Break clean away from the old yearning navel-string of love, which unites us to the body of everything. Break it, and be born. Fall apart into your own isolation; set apart single and potent in singularity for ever. One is one and all alone and ever more shall be so. Exult in it. . . . Exult in your own dark being.[38]

"Medlars and Sorb Apples" is about just such a navel-string-breaking birth-experience, about the exultation of achieving that state of "dark being" which is the self's final loneliness. It is also, in however disguised a form, a poem about sexual politics: Orpheus' last damning word to Eurydice. The poem opens with a passionate apostrophe to the medlars and sorb-apples of the title:

> I love you, rotten,
> Delicious rottenness.
>
> I love to suck you out from your skins
> So brown and soft and coming suave,
> So morbid, as the Italians say.[39]

Since Lawrence himself tells us, in the prose preface introducing the "Fruits" section of *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers*, that "fruits are all of them female," and that "when they break and show the seed, then we look into the womb and see its secrets,"[40] these opening lines would seem to present themselves as an unambiguous sexual metaphor, with the

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"delicious rottenness" of the fruit symbolizing the female mystery that, when "sucked out" by the male poet, exudes a pungent, death-like sweetness—the secret, frightening but powerful, of the female Underworld. But Lawrence quickly undermines such a reading by associating the "brown morbidity" of the medlars and sorb-apples, not with women or feminine mystery, but with the potent masculinity of "white gods":

What is it, in the grape turning raisin,
In the medlar, in the sorb-apple . . .,
What is it that reminds us of white gods?

Gods nude as blanched nut-kernels,
Strangely, half-sinisterly flesh-fragrant
As if with sweat,
And drenched with mystery.

Having thus dispensed with the poem's potential female Other, the poet descends to the Underworld swiftly and neatly, striding "down the strange lanes of hell" without the aid of a Eurydice-figure to serve either as "threshold," goal, or guide:

Sorb-apples, medlars with dead crowns.
I say, wonderful are the hellish experiences,
Orphic, delicate
Dionysos of the Underworld.

A kiss, and a spasm of farewell, a moment's orgasm
of rupture,
Then along the damp road alone, till the next turning.
And there, a new partner, a new parting, a new
unfusing into twain,
A new gasp of further isolation,
A new intoxication of loneliness, among decaying, frost-
cold leaves.

The orgasmic imagery of the poem invites us to recall the familiar Lawrentian dictum that it is in sex that we become most aware of our isolation, of life's proximity to death. But this "orgasm of rupture" does not entail the "death agony," the "Osiris-cry of abandonment," that it does in such other *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers* poems as "Turtle Shout." Here, leave-taking and loneliness are not painful but "intoxicating," "exquisite," and "perfect," as the soul becomes

. . . ever more vividly embodied
Like a flame blown whiter and whiter
In a deeper and deeper darkness
Ever more exquisite, distilled in separation.

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"Medlars" is above all, then, a poem about self-discovery, self-accomplishment, and the rapture of achieving self-fulfillment through a kind of mystic self-intoxication: an incantatory "Orphic farewell, and farewell, and farewell." Yet with the invocation of Orpheus—linked here, as he probably was in his earliest mythological manifestations, with the wine-god Dionysus—Lawrence cannot help but bring at least the shadow of Eurydice into the poem. She has been left unnamed, to be sure, and her image has been refracted into that of the endlessly multiplied "new partner" who is always already waiting, ripe for the next farewell, at "the next turning": at every turn of the road or, in a slightly different reading, every time Orpheus turns. In contrast to Orpheus, "distilled in separation," this Eurydice is scattered and substanceless, much like the young bride of Rilke's "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes," who upon entering the Underworld is immediately

> . . . loosened like long hair
> and given forth like fallen rain,
> and shared like a hundredfold provision.[41]

Despite Eurydice's physical absence, however, her voice still echoes clearly through the poem:

> So, in the strange retorts of medlars and sorb-apples
> The distilled essence of hell.
> The exquisite odour of leave-taking,
> *Jamque vale*!
> Orpheus, and the winding, leaf clogged, silent lanes of hell.

"*Jamque vale*," as Lawrence must have known, are among Eurydice's last words to Orpheus in Virgil's *Georgics*, the earliest recorded account of the myth.[42] Whether the poem, then, is about loneliness discovered through sex, or about the close kinship of sex to death, or about the self's euphoric farewell to the fetters of its earthly consciousness, it is also about a man's desire to experience the intoxicating mysteries of the Underworld in the company only of the "white gods" who represent his own distillation into perfection, his own more accessible otherness. This Orpheus soundly rejects Eurydice, both as archetype and as individual, in favor of "the *ego sum* of Dionysos / The *sono io* of perfect drunkenness"; his descent now is no longer into "the unknown within the dark embrace of a wife,"[43] but into an "intoxication of final loneliness": the known, egoistic depths of the self.

Though feminists are quick to point out that the persistent historical association of "the feminine" with darkness, intuition, and passivity oppresses women more than it honors them, implicitly barring

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them access to the privileged male realms of reason, action, and political power,[44] one can at least argue that Lawrence's pre-1918 gender ideology did pay some form of homage to women, for it offered them a space of their own, a narrow venue of power, so that a poet like H. D. could stake out her fragment of poetic turf, if in no other way, at least by articulating "the woman vibration." If Lawrence, as Orpheus, felt confident enough to descend to Eurydice's Underworld, at least he admitted that he needed her help to get there. In his postwar "male comradeship" phase, however, Lawrence grants all power, all privilege, and all action to men, "the leaders, the outriders."[45] He begins by appropriating the Underworld, the realm of otherness that he once exclusively associated with women, as the domain of the emphatically male "white gods" who represent his phallic consciousness. Critics have described Lawrence's "male comradeship" phase in terms of a "turn against women," thus implying that Lawrence executed the kind of destructive Orphic turn that H. D. reacted against in "Eurydice," stereotypically consigning women to an artistically limited and politically powerless Underworld.[46] But in the misogynist phase following hard on the war years, Lawrence did not turn *against* women, fixing them with his damaging, dismissive Orphic gaze, so much as turn *away* from them, refusing even to acknowledge their contribution to his own artistic empowerment.

Thus, in his 1923 *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, Lawrence no longer professes to seek a "new world" associated with feminine mystery, but calls instead only for masculine energy and enlightenment. In a passage recalling his 1913 poem "She Looks Back," a virulent tirade against mother-love in which he castigates Frieda for longing for the young children she abandoned for his sake,[47] Lawrence exhorts his male contemporaries:

> You've got to know that you're a man, and being a man means you go on alone, ahead of the woman, to break a way through the old world into the new. And you've got to be alone. And you've got to start off ahead . . . and never look back. Because Lot's wife, looking back, was turned to a pillar of salt, these miserable men, for ever looking back to their women for guidance, they are miserable pillars of half-rotten tears.[48]

Lawrence transfers onto modern man the consequences of a woman's mythical transgression, suggesting that a taboo peek backward will result not merely, as for Orpheus, in the loss of the desired Other, but also, as for Lot's wife, in self-condemnation. Thus he portrays Orpheus' turn—the poet's ambitious attempt to see into the worlds of light and

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darkness, life and death, male and female, simultaneously—as a gesture not of artistic ambition but rather of "feminine" weakness.

For Lawrence of the early 1920s, with his bitter attacks on feminism and his disturbing fascination with male-dominated, protofascist modes of government, vision marched in a straight line, with no ambiguous glances to the right or left; Orpheus remained a useful model only so long as he never looked back. Shortly before his death, Lawrence would reverse his position, turning once again toward a more positive view of womanhood by reaffirming, with the publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *The Man Who Died*, at least some of the "tenderness" and other feminine values that he had a few years earlier so strenuously rejected.[49] Yet he would never renew his personal contact with H. D., whose accusations in "Eurydice" he had so effectively deflected with the self-absorbed "*sono io*" of "Medlars and Sorb Apples." As H. D. herself would later recall, his last letter to her represented a definitive turn away: "'I hope never to see you again,' he wrote" (*TF*, p. 134).[50]

Nonetheless, Lawrence did cast a final glance—a conciliatory rather than a damning one—in H. D.'s direction; or so, at least, H. D. herself came to believe. When, after Lawrence's death, Stephen Guest delivered to her a copy of *The Man Who Died* with the words, "Lawrence wrote this for you" (*TF*, p. 134),[51] she was clearly flattered by Guest's suggestion that Lawrence had modeled his priestess of Isis, who ministers to and regenerates the risen Christ/Osiris, after her. In *Tribute to Freud* she chronicles how, during and after her 1933–34 psychoanalytic sessions with Sigmund Freud, she came to recognize Lawrence not only as Orpheus to her Eurydice, leader to her follower, but also as Osiris to her Isis: the twin-brother, mirror-image initial-sharer who inspires her artistically but whose shattered image she in turn must gather up, reconstruct, re-member.[52] Commenting on the hagiographic depictions of Lawrence published by his many female "disciples"—a "choros of Maenads," she calls their accounts (*TF*, p. 133)[53]—H. D. grudgingly admits that "I envied these women who have written memoirs of D. H. Lawrence, feeling that they had found in him some sort of guide or master" (*TF*, pp. 140–41). Her own recollections, however, present the voice not of an adoring follower but of an ambivalent equal. "I am almost afraid to speak," she confesses in her 1935 poem "The Poet," almost certainly written with Lawrence in mind; "I certainly won't cry out, 'hail,' / or 'farewell' or the things people do shout" (*CP*, pp. 461–66).[54] Rejecting Eurydice's traditional, final "*jamque vale*"—"and now farewell"—H. D. in fact would go on to write about Lawrence extensively, just as she would obsessively reconstruct and

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reexamine, both in fictionalized form and in her journals and memoirs, her relationships with such other problematic figures in her life as Frances Gregg, Ezra Pound, and Richard Aldington.[55]

Bid Me to Live—begun in 1927, heavily revised over several decades, and finally published in 1960—represents H. D.'s most sustained attempt to put Lawrence/Osiris back together again, shaping a new image from the shards of memory. As she does with Freud in her 1956 *Tribute to Freud*, she gains control over Lawrence's powerful image by placing him within a mythological framework of her own making, associating him with a range of symbolic and historical figures whose significance she herself can fix and manipulate[56]—reducing Rico, for instance, from the great Lawrentian poet/lover to "an Orpheus head, severed from its body" (*BMTL*, p. 51). Claiming her own position as Lawrence's literary and symbolic equal, she goes on to portray him as Dis, the ruler of the Underworld, and herself as Persephone, who like Orpheus can pass between the realms of life and death:

> Tenderness. That was it, not flame and seething passion, the dark-god he spoke of. Or if a dark-god, then one truly, Dis of the under-world. . . . He had called her Persephone. . . . He was burnt out too, and white, but there was no dark flame now, none of his dark-god, unless he were Dis of the under-world, the husband of Persephone. Yes, he was her husband. (*BMTL*, p. 141)

In portraying him as Persephone's "burnt out" husband, H. D. invites a no longer threatening Lawrence to share the creative space that she, in "Eurydice," had long ago claimed as her own—to join her, that is, in her "tender" female Underworld, now a place of refuge and strength. She covertly acknowledges the gentler, conciliatory tone of such late poems as Lawrence's "Bavarian Gentians,"[57] in which the dying poet—plucking, perhaps, one of the "flowers of myself" that H. D. bravely grew in "Eurydice"—gingerly bears a torch-like blue gentian down to

> the sightless realm where darkness is awake upon the dark
> and Persephone herself is but a voice
> or a darkness invisible enfolded in the deeper dark
> of the arms Plutonic.

"Lead me then, lead the way," urges Lawrence, the Orphic poet who once wanted only to be followed.[58] For although he makes his final journey alone—"let me guide myself . . . down the darker and darker stairs"—the poet of "Bavarian Gentians" does not succumb to the "intoxification of final loneliness" that closed "Medlars and Sorb Apples." Instead he seeks, with his "torches of darkness," to discover

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and illuminate—"shed darkness on"—Pluto and Persephone, "the lost bride and her groom": the male and female deities of darkness as they lie at last in conjugal embrace.

Toward the end of *Bid Me to Live*, Julia defiantly reminds Rico, and perhaps herself as well, that "Rafe is not the Marble Faun, not even a second-rate Dionysus[59]. . . . He is not Dionysus, you are not Orpheus. You are human people, Englishmen, madmen" (*BMTL*, pp. 163–64). Though she unceremoniously hauls a mythologized and self-mythologizing Lawrence/Orpheus/Dis up from Eurydice's murky Underworld, H. D. nonetheless ends her novel with an affectionate tribute to his memory, acknowledging the initiatory, even inspirational role he has played in her work even while gently condemning his "mad" gender ideology. From Lawrence's 1912 love-poem "Gloire de Dijon" she appropriates the term "gloire," which she uses to describe her own artistic aspirations, the ineffable visionary aura that she was straining to capture in her writing. The *gloire*, as Julia explains to Rico, represents the resolution of the conflict between them; it symbolizes Orpheus and Eurydice, Osiris and Isis, Dis and Persephone, together—maleness and femaleness fused in a single artist and a single work of art: "Perhaps you would say I was trespassing, couldn't see both sides, as you said of my Orpheus. I could be Eurydice in character, you said, but woman-is-woman and I couldn't be both. The *gloire* is both" (*BMTL*, p. 176).[60]

Like the mythical Orpheus at his most ambitious moment, H. D. tries, with the image of the *gloire*, to "see both sides": to encompass at once the world of man and the world of woman in the range of her own artistic vision. In the end, however, she turns away from mythology altogether, and back to the realm of human common sense: "No, that spoils it; it is both and neither. It is simply myself sitting here . . . propped up in bed, scribbling in a notebook, with a candle at my elbow" (*BMTL*, p. 177).

[1] See Joachim Schondorff, ed., *Orpheus und Eurydike: Poliziana, Calderón, Gluck, Offenbach, Kokoschka, Cocteau, Anouilh* (Munich: Langen, 1963); Walter A. Strauss, *Descent and Return: The Orphic Theme in Modern Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971); and John Warden, ed., *Orpheus: The Metamorphoses of a Myth* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1982).

[2] Strauss, *Descent and Return*, p. 18. See also Ihab Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1981), for an explicit association of the Orpheus myth with what Hassan calls postmodernism's "crisis of language and culture" (p. xiii).

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[3] Strauss, *Descent and Return*, p. 18.

[4] See Emmet Robbins, "Famous Orpheus," in Warden, *Orpheus*, pp. 9–17.

[5] The Orpheus/Eurydice story appears in Virgil, *Georgics* IV: 453–527, and in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* X: 1–85. In both accounts, Orpheus descends to the Underworld to retrieve his dead wife Eurydice, who has been bitten by a poisonous snake. He charms Pluto and Persephone with his song, so that they agree to let him lead Eurydice out of the Underworld, but only upon the condition that he neither speak to her nor turn around. He breaks the taboo, and Eurydice is forced to return to the world of the dead.

[6] For a discussion of Jacopo Peri's *Euridice* (1600) and Monteverdi's *La Favola d'Orfeo* (1607), both of which omit the condition of the turn altogether, see Timothy J. McGee, "*Orfeo* and *Euridice*, the First Two Operas," in Warden, *Orpheus*, pp. 163–81. In Gluck's 1762 *Orfeo ed Euridice*, Eurydice is first lost but then restored to Orpheus in an abrupt deus ex machina happy ending. See also *The Magic Flute*, Mozart's loosely adapted version of the Orpheus myth, in which Tamino successfully leads Pamina through the hellish "trial of fire and water."

[7] See Rainer Maria Rilke, "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes," in *The Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage, 1984), pp. 51–54; and *The Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985).

[8] "Eurydice est . . . l'extrême que l'art puisse atteindre, elle est, sous un nom qui la dissimule et sous un voile qui la couvre, le point profondément obscur vers lequel l'art, le désir, la mort, la nuit semblent tendre. . . ." Maurice Blanchot, "Le Regard d'Orphée," in *L'Espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), pp. 179–84. (All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own).

[9] Klaus Theweleit, "The Politics of Orpheus between Women, Hades, Political Power and the Media: Some Thoughts on the Configuration of the European Artist, Starting with the Figure of Gottfried Benn, Or: What Happens to Eurydice?," *New German Critique*, 36 (Fall 1985), 133–56. Theweleit ends his discussion of Benn and the Orpheus myth by asking "whether the sacrifice of women, which is one of the bases of artistic production in patriarchal societies, is not just a symbolic one, but one that goes on in the lives of real couples . . . one that concerns living men and especially living women directly" (p. 156).

[10] While H. D.'s self-identification with Eurydice has already been ably discussed by a number of critics (see Note 31, below), Lawrence's Orphic responses have not. My analysis of the conflict, therefore, tends to dwell more on Lawrence's work and ideas than on H. D.'s. Lest I should seem to privilege the male poet's voice by presenting only Orpheus' side of the story, however, I will explicate H. D.'s Eurydicean protests and strategies as well—though at the conscious risk of covering material that may seem familiar to readers already well versed in recent H. D. criticism.

[11] For a sobering overview of that battle, its political and historical implications, and its literary consequences, see Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. I: *The War of the Words* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1988).

[12] H. D., *Bid Me to Live: A Madrigal* (London: Virago, 1984), p. 51. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *BMTL*.

[13] H. D.'s poem "Eurydice," first published in the *Egoist* in May 1917, was

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composed at Corfe Castle, Dorset, in late 1916, at a time when she was exchanging manuscripts with Lawrence (see H. D., "Autobiographical Notes," Beinecke Library, Yale University [henceforth "Beinecke"]). "Eurydice" bears little resemblance to the rather incoherent free-verse fragments that make up Julia's "Orpheus" poem in *Bid Me to Live*. More important in the context of the novel than the fragments themselves, however, is their reception by Rafe (Julia's poet-husband) and Rico; their battle for editorial precedence over Julia's drafts defines the background of gender conflict and critical aspersion against which "Eurydice" must have been written.

[14] For an illuminating discussion of the patterns of dependence and betrayal, documented in *Bid Me to Live* and elsewhere, that were to mark H. D.'s relationships with men throughout her life, see Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "Romantic Thralldom in H. D.," *Contemporary Literature*, 20, No. 2 (Summer 1979), 178–203. DuPlessis shows how H. D.'s literary attempts to come to grips with these emotionally self-destructive tendencies ultimately contributed to her artistic self-empowerment.

[15] See especially Peter Firchow, "Rico and Julia: The Hilda Doolittle-D. H. Lawrence Affair Reconsidered," *Journal of Modern Literature*, 8, No. 2 (1980), 51–76; and Janice S. Robinson, *H. D.: The Life and Work of an American Poet* (Boston: Houghton, 1982), pp. 92–226 and passim. Both Firchow and Robinson share the enterprise of determining, almost solely on the basis of "encoded" novelistic hints, whether or not H. D. and Lawrence were lovers. Firchow concludes that they probably were not, while Robinson argues not only that they carried on a prolonged and passionate affair, but also that Lawrence was the father of H. D.'s daughter Perdita. For an incisive attack on the methodological shortcomings and factual inaccuracies of Robinson's book, see Sandra M. Gilbert, "H. D.? Who Was She?," *Contemporary Literature*, 24, No. 4 (Winter 1983), 496–511. For further rebuttals to Robinson's claims, see H. D.'s letter to Bryher (16 Jan. 1935) in which H. D. comments "how grateful I am . . . that I never slept with D. H. L." (Beinecke); and Perdita Schaffner's indication, in her afterword to *Bid Me to Live*, that Cecil Gray was her father (*BMTL*, pp. 185–94).

[16] For two examples of intertextual resonances between Lawrence and H. D., see Gary Barnett, "H. D. and Lawrence: Two Allusions," *H. D. Newsletter*, 1, No. 1 (Spring 1987), 32–35; and David Roessel, "H. D. and Lawrence: Two More Allusions," *H. D. Newsletter*, 1, No. 2 (Winter 1987), 46–50. Both Barnett and Roessel argue, as I will, that the literary relationship between H. D. and Lawrence was characterized as much by adversarial tension as by mutual admiration.

[17] Despite her fascination with Lawrence's personal "power," H. D. would remain notably unenthralled by his work, complaining in 1917 that his poems contained "too much body and emotions" and remarking of his "interminable" novels (*BMTL*, p. 164), or what Julia calls Rico's "heady sex-expositions" (*BMTL*, p. 76), that "they didn't seem to ring true. That is, I was not susceptible to the frenzy in them." See D. H. Lawrence, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. III: Oct. 1916–June 1921 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), p. 102; and H. D., *Advent*, in *Tribute to Freud* (New York: New Directions, 1974), p. 133. (Subsequent references to *Tribute to Freud* are cited parenthetically in the text as *TF*.)

[18] See H. D.'s 1955 memoir *Compassionate Friendship* (Beinecke), p. 35. The

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other six "initiators" were Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington, John Cournos, Cecil Gray, Kenneth MacPherson, and Walter Schmideberg.

[19] Letter to John Cournos, 31 Oct., 1916. Printed in "Art and Ardor in World War One: Selected Letters from H. D. to John Cournos," *Iowa Review*, 16, No. 3 (Fall 1986), 139–40.

[20] See Lawrence's letter to Arthur McLeod (21 Dec. 1916): "H. D. is good: none of the others worth anything" (Lawrence, *Letters*, III, 61); and to Edward Marsh (29 Jan. 1917): "Don't you think H. D.—Mrs. Aldington—writes some good poetry? I do—really very good. I send you an *Egoist* for this month. It is nothing of a paper—but H. D. is good, without doubt" (*ibid.*, p. 84). Lawrence's praise of H. D., though consistent, is uncharacteristically inarticulate; "good," it seems, is about the most evocative adjective he manages to produce.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 179, n. 2.

[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 179–80 (7 Nov. 1917). Apparently at Richard Aldington's insistence, the reference to H. D. (Hilda Aldington) was omitted from the early editions of Lawrence's letters.

[23] I borrow the notion of sex as a "Harrowing of Hell" from Frank Kermode, "Lawrence and the Apocalyptic Types," in *Modern Critical Views of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), pp. 59–71. Kermode's specific reference is not to penile/vaginal intercourse, but to the anal sex—a "love-death" that "amalgamates heaven and hell, life-flow and death-flow, in one act"—that Ursula and Connie experience in *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, respectively (p. 69).

[24] D. H. Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), p. 104. The *Study*, written between Sept. 1914 and March 1915, was first published posthumously in 1936.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 105.

[26] For an exhaustive list of the opposed traits, characteristics, and aptitudes that Lawrence associated with each sex, see H. M. Daleski, *The Forked Flame: A Study of D. H. Lawrence* (London: Faber, 1965), pp. 30–31.

[27] Lawrence, *Study*, p. 127.

[28] For an informative discussion of Lawrence's literary collaborations with women, see Hilary Simpson, *D. H. Lawrence and Feminism* (London: Croom and Helm, 1982), esp. Chap. 7, "A Literary Trespasser" (pp. 143–60). Simpson argues that "it seems to be the pervasive concept of femininity as 'raw material' and masculinity as 'shaping force' which underlies [Lawrence's] use of women's writing" (p. 147).

[29] H. D., *Collected Poems 1912–1944*, ed. Louis L. Martz (New York: New Directions, 1983), pp. 51–56. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *CP*.

[30] These are Eurydice's responses in Virgil's and Ovid's versions of the myth, respectively. In the *Georgics* (IV: 453–527) she laments the "madness" and the "cruel fate" that have caused her husband to beak the taboo and turn; while in the *Metamorphoses* (X: 1–85) she utters no recriminations whatsoever, merely muttering "Vale!" before slipping back to the Underworld.

[31] For other readings of "Eurydice," see especially Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 70–71 and 105–10; and DuPlessis, "Family, Sexes, Psyche: An Essay on H. D. and the Muse of the Woman

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Writer," in *H. D.: Woman and Poet*, ed. Michael King (Orono: National Poetry Foundation, 1986), pp. 70–71. A more general discussion of the feminist, revisionary strategies that H. D. employs in this and other poems is offered by Alicia Ostriker, "The Poet as Heroine: Learning to Read H. D.," in *Writing Like a Woman* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1983), pp. 7–41; and Ostriker, "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking," *Signs*, 8, No. 1 (Autumn 1982), 68–90.

[32] Cornelia Nixon, *Lawrence's Leadership Politics and the Turn against Women* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1986), p. 10.

[33] Simpson, *D. H. Lawrence and Feminism*, p. 15.

[34] D. H. Lawrence, "Nathaniel Hawthorne," in *The Symbolic Meaning*, ed. Armin Arnold (London: Centaur, 1962), p. 131. The Hawthorne essay, written sometime between 1917 and 1919, first appeared in the *English Review* (May 1919), and was republished in significantly revised form in Lawrence's 1923 *Studies in Classic American Literature*.

[35] D. H. Lawrence, "Fantasia of the Unconscious" (1922), in *Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (London: Heinemann, 1961), p. 188.

[36] D. H. Lawrence, "Education of the People," in *Phoenix. The Posthumous Papers, 1936*, ed. Edward D. McDonald (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 623.

[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 630–31.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 634.

[39] D. H. Lawrence, *The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts (London: Heinemann, 1964), pp. 280–81.

[40] "Medlars and Sorb Apples" was first published in the *New Republic* (5 Jan. 1921) and was reprinted in the *English Review* (Aug. 1921). It appears with some minor changes in the 1923 collection *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*. The prose prefaces to the various sections were not printed until 1930.

[41] "aufgelöst wie langes Haar / und hingegeben wie gefallner Regen / und ausgeteilt wie hundertfacher Vorrat." Rilke, *Selected Poems*, pp. 52–53 (translation mine).

[42] Virgil, *Georgics* IV: 497. In a letter to Catherine Carswell (5 Feb. 1917), Lawrence calls "And now farewell" ("*Jamque vale*") the "motto" to *Look! We Have Come Through*, his 1917 volume of love/hate poems about his relationship with Frieda (Lawrence, *Letters*, III, 87). H. D., in her 1957 long poem *Vale Ave*, implicitly rejects Lawrence's poetics of abandonment in her depiction of a recurrent historical pattern not only of romantic valediction ("Vale") but also of reunion ("Ave"). H. D., *Vale Ave*, *New Directions in Prose and Poetry*, 44 (New York: New Directions, 1982), pp. 18–68.

[43] Lawrence, *Study*, p. 105.

[44] For two particularly eloquent statements of this position, see Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949), trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Bantam Books, 1961); and Hélène Cixous, "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/ Forays," in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 63–130.

[45] Lawrence, "Education," p. 665.

[46] See, for example, the title of Cornelia Nixon's book, *Lawrence's Leadership Politics and the Turn against Women*.

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[47] Lawrence, *Compete Poems*, pp. 205–08.

[48] Lawrence, "Fantasia," p. 189.

[49] "Tenderness" was Lawrence's original title for *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. H. M. Daleski calls the novel, with its emphasis on "tender" sexual love, "an implicit vindication of the female principle" (Daleski, *The Forked Flame*, p. 15). Hilary Simpson, however, persuasively argues that Lawrence, by using the phallus as a symbol of softness and fragility as well as of strength and power throughout the novel, manages to "subsume the female principle into the male" rather than according renewed importance to femininity itself (Simpson, *D. H. Lawrence and Feminism*, p. 129). See also Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1971), for a lively if somewhat unbalanced account of Lawrence's gender ideology; Millett argues that Lawrence is not only "the most talented and fervid of sexual politicians," but "the most subtle as well, for it is through a feminine consciousness that his masculine message [that women should remain sexually passive] is conveyed" (p. 239).

[50] H. D. may have been referring to Lawrence's letter of 10 Aug. 1929, in which he wrote, presumably in reply to her request for a meeting: "But now it's more than ten years since we met, and what should we have to say? God knows! Nothing, really. It's no use saying anything. That's my last conviction. Least said, soonest mended; which assumes that the breakage has already happened." D. H. Lawrence, *The Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Harry T. Moore (New York: Viking, 1962), II, 1175.

[51] H. D. reports in *Advent* that she at first thought Lawrence must have stolen the plot of *The Man Who Died*—"the story of the wounded but living Christ, waking up in the rock-tomb" (*TF*, p. 142)—from her own unpublished novel *Pilate's Wife* (Beinecke). The final draft of her novel, begun in 1924 but completed in 1934 after she had read *The Man Who Died*, serves as her female-centered response to Lawrence's version of the male prophet's story.

[52] In *Advent*, noting that she and Lawrence were born 364 days apart, H. D. comments that "for one day in the year, H. D. and D. H. Lawrence were twins" (*TF*, p. 141); and in the unpublished *Thorn Thicket* (Beinecke), she muses on the mirror-image likeness of their initials (p. 39). For more on H. D.'s re-visions of Lawrence in these two memoirs, see Janice S. Robinson, "What's in a Box?: Psychoanalytic Concept and Literary Technique in H. D.," in King, ed., *H. D.: Woman and Poet*, pp. 237–57.

[53] H. D. herself is referred to as an "Orphic maenad" by Cecil Gray in his memoir *Musical Chairs, or Between Two Stools* (London: Home and Van Thal, 1948), pp. 133–34. The Maenads, in the early accounts of the Orpheus myth, dismember Orpheus because they are angry at him for having neglected other women after losing Eurydice. Ovid introduces a homosexual undercurrent by noting that Orpheus spends his time, after Eurydice's death, solely in the company of young boys—an aspect of the story that, given Lawrence's own preoccupations with homosexuality and "male comradeship" during his misogynist phase, suggests some intriguing parallels.

[54] See also Louis L. Martz's commentary on the poem (*CP*, pp. xxviii–xxix). "The Poet" was first published in *Life and Letters Today*, 13 (Dec. 1935), 80–83.

[55] On Frances Gregg, see *HERmione* (New York: New Directions, 1981), and the unpublished novels *Paint It Today* and *Asphodel* (Beinecke); on Ezra

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Pound, *HERmione* and *End to Torment* (New York: New Directions, 1979); and on Richard Aldington, *Bid Me to Live* and numerous unpublished novels.

[56] See Susan Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H. D.* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 1–154, for a brilliant account of how H. D. willfully misread Freudian ideology—transforming "the Professor" himself from the empirical scientist he claimed to be into a sort of prophet/deity—as a means to establishing her own visionary, revisionary feminist poetics.

[57] As she describes in *Advent* and *Compassionate Friendship*, H. D. read several books by and about Lawrence after his death in 1930; I have not, however, found any explicit mention in her writings of his *Last Poems*, although it seems extremely likely that she would at some point have seen the book, which was edited by her estranged husband Richard Aldington and published in 1932. Whether or not H. D. actually read "Bavarian Gentians" before writing *Bid Me to Live*, however, makes little difference to my argument that both H. D. and Lawrence adopted, especially toward the end of their lives, a conciliatory tone—masking, to be sure, a series of defensive strategies that might still be read as hostile—toward the creative threat that the other embodied.

[58] Though "Medlars and Sorb Apples" celebrates solitude and the rejection of the female, "Purple Anemones," one of the most virulently misogynistic poems of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, instead describes gender relations in terms of the sadistic pleasure of the chase; Pluto, "Proserpine's master," lets his "enfranchised" wife escape from the Underworld once a year only so that he may track his "white victim" down again: "Poor Persephone and her rights for women" (Lawrence, *Collected Poems*, pp. 307–09). "Bavarian Gentians," according a renewed dignity to the figure of Persephone, can thus be read as a tamed, conciliatory response not only to "Medlars" but to "Purple Anemones" as well.

[59] Richard Aldington ("Rafe") is figured as Dionysus in "The God" (H. D., *Collected Poems*, pp. 45–47), a poem written along with "Eurydice" at Corfe Castle in 1916 and first published in *Egoist*, 4 (Jan. 1917). See H. D.'s "Autobiographical Notes" (Beinecke).

[60] For more on this passage and H. D.'s use of the *gloire* image, see DuPlessis, "Romantic Thralldom," pp. 186–88.

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For Whom the Bell Tolls and *The Magic Mountain:* Hemingway's Debt to Thomas Mann

William Adair

Hemingway brought a great deal of material to the writing of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Linda Wagner says there was "really too much material at hand."[1] That idea is supported by the story's hero, too.[2] Yet Hemingway was able to form this great mass of material into a complex story—not one based on his own experience; he says he "made it up"—with a wide variety of characters, and using a number of formal and stylistic devices. As Wagner suggests, this was technically a great leap forward for Hemingway. She credits this to a kind of bringing together of techniques (and themes) he had tried out from *To Have and Have Not* through his Spanish Civil War short stories and play.

We can extend her discussion by pointing out that Hemingway used literary "sources" other than his own previous work in writing this novel. Some of these other sources seem to be T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, *Don Quixote*, Yeats's "The Second Coming," and knightly romances.[3] And considering the hero's river name and the novel's echoes of a vegetation god whose fate is attached to the book's "seasons," a god who dies sacrificially to bring fertility to the waste land, Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* should probably be added to this list. Another to add, one even more important than Lawrence's book, is Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. There are a great many similarities between *The Magic Mountain* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, in terms of themes, techniques, characters, and even story shape. There are so many, in fact, that it is easy to believe that Hemingway found in Mann's big book something of a model for

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turning his own abundant material into a complex and integrated novel—his first attempt at a lengthy novel of inclusion rather than a lyric novel of omission. Before turning to the many similarities between these two twentieth-century epics (which at first glance seem so dissimilar), let us first consider in chronological order Hemingway's references to Mann, and his interest in Mann.

In a 1925 letter to Fitzgerald Hemingway praised highly Mann's family novel, *Buddenbrooks*,[4] and thereafter it had a permanent place on all of his suggested reading lists. In fact, it may have had some influence on *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Hemingway's Spanish epic is in one sense a family novel. The dynamics of Pablo's "family" of guerrillas is comparable to those of Jordan's boyhood family, so in a sense he is reliving (complete with oedipal conflict in the cave) what Freud called the "family romance."[5] And of course Jordan remembers at length his strong grandfather, his weak father, and his mother, and anguishes over his father's suicide—an act that seems an important cause of his own deep inclination toward death—and his struggle against that inclination. (As we shall see, Hans is also secretly inclined toward death because of his family history.) *Buddenbrooks* concerns the fated, seemingly "genetic" decline of a conservative upper-middle-class family. Hemingway, with an artistic mother and conservative father (constant types in Mann's fiction)—though a sensitive, nervous, and finally suicidal father—may have suspected, by the time he came to write Jordan's story, a similar decline in his own family. Jordan meditates on the decline in his family, and once in distinctly genetic terms (*FBT*, pp. 338–39). Hans of *The Magic Mountain* is somewhat like Hanno Buddenbrooks; he is not an artist, but at the Berghof he has learned (like Hanno) to love the sensual and meditative life—which Mann associates with a deep wish for the release of death—rather than the active life of his commercial forebears. Suicide (his father's and his own) was often on Hemingway's mind while writing Jordan's story. In a letter to his first wife he mentioned "taking the easy way out" as his father had done—but it would be a "bad example" to the children; and to the Russian critic Ivan Kashkin he wrote that "living is much more difficult and complicated than dying,'" which might serve as a motto for his novel, and for *The Magic Mountain*, too.[6]

Mann's "Disorder and Early Sorrow" was among Hemingway's favorite short stories—and it was among the proposed titles for *A Farewell to Arms*.[7] *The Magic Mountain* appeared in English in 1927, and soon thereafter Hemingway borrowed it from Sylvia Beach's library; he had this same edition (see Note *22* below) in his libraries at Key West

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and in Cuba.[8] Mann won the Nobel Prize in 1929, and in a 1930 letter to Guy Hickok Hemingway said he was "damned glad" about it.[9] "'Who is your Thomas Mann?'" the German Kandisky asks in *Green Hills of Africa*. "'We do not have great writers,'" Hemingway answers, apparently meaning writers great throughout their career rather than one-great-book writers. Later in the book he refers to *Buddenbrooks*, suggesting that scenes from this novel are well-etched in memory.[10] In the Lillian Ross interview (written just after he had completed *Across the River and into the Trees*), Hemingway jokingly remarks that he is not Thomas Mann, and so one should get another opinion on Fitzgerald.[11] As Carlos Baker implies, it is likely that Mann's "Death in Venice" had some influence on Hemingway's *Across the River and into the Trees*.[12] All of this seems to suggest that Mann was in a sense on Hemingway's mind throughout most of his career. It seems fair to say that he thought Mann and Joyce the two great writers of the twentieth century, though he expressed certain reservations about Joyce.

The Magic Mountain is of course vast and complex. Again, it appears that to some extent it provided a model for Hemingway in writing *For Whom the Bell Tolls*; that is, in Mann's book Hemingway found themes (accelerated time and education, the inclination toward death) and techniques (the leitmotiv, development by repetition and intensification more than by story, a combining of the realistic and the dreamlike) that were not entirely new to him. He also found characters with whom he sympathized. I think he found a story shape and a number of incidents, too, all of which helped to guide him in shaping and giving expression to his own great mass of material.

Both *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Magic Mountain* are novels of education, which take place (shortly before the outbreak of world war) atop a kind of magic mountain. In this "heightening atmosphere"—and it is so because of the nearness of passionate love and the nearness of death (which the hero seems half in love with)—the passive and often prone hero, in a highly sensitized state of mind and emotions, undergoes a miraculously speeded-up education, flying through the "years."[13] The relativity of time, a theme in both books, becomes a matter of narrative time (as we shall see later in this essay). The educations of the passive heroes, Robert Jordan and Hans Castorp, are achieved by experiencing new and startling events, memory, and meditation, and perhaps more than anything else, through their student-auditor relationships with various "lecturers," dominant personalities who represent various attitudes toward life.[14] After completing his education—in a sense, after many "years" have passed by for the

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hero—each young man descends his mountain and dies on the field of battle.[15] Hans dies to bring about a better world, and (unconsciously, at least) does so willingly. The same can be said of Jordan. They both find on their mountaintop a reason to live, a serious purpose in life; and that purpose is to die—sacrificially, hence justifiably—for a noble cause. So each of these novels of "accelerated" education atop a magic mountain has basically the same story shape: a bell-shaped curve, a trip up a mountain, and then (after many "years") a descent to a place of death.

Both novels are abundantly detailed and realistic; yet at the same time they have an interior, subjective quality (memory, meditation, many "estranged" states of mind), and even a mystical dimension: for example, gypsy fortune-telling in one, séances in the other. In each book we also find implied knightly romance and fairy-tale dimensions. Both novels make use of the microcosm technique—which is new in Hemingway's work—and as mentioned, both aspire toward a musical structure. Many commentators have noticed the musical structure of Mann's novel.[16] Hemingway's usual repetition (of scenes, images, action, dialogue) with variation operates on a grand scale in his novel: "every damn word and action in this book depends on every other word and action," he said; protesting against cuts of some of the more gruesome scenes, he said it would be like taking "the bass viol or the oboe out of my orchestra" because it makes an ugly sound "when played alone."[17]

Again, a family theme is important in each book. The hero becomes part of a "family" atop his magic mountain. More important, he must overcome past family influences, which have instilled in him an accentuated consciousness of death, and even a kind of hidden love of easeful death. When Hans was a child his mother, then his father, and finally his beloved grandfather died.[18] Jordan struggles to overcome the suicide of his father.

Thus the conflict seems essentially the same for each of our relatively passive heroes: a conflict between a high-minded duty to life and mankind and a secret, unconscious wish for death. It is a conflict between Duty and Goodness and the desire for the release of dissolving death.[19]

Perhaps the simplest and clearest way to observe the surprising number of similarities between these two novels is to follow the general outline of action and situation in Hemingway's book and see how often it coincides with Mann's book.

For Whom the Bell Tolls begins with Jordan, accompanied by Anselmo, pausing on his climb up the mountain. Soon the steep climb continues, then he meets Pablo and gets the first hint that things may

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not go as planned. They continue the climb, proceeding to the cave, where Jordan has a meal and begins to meet other characters, whom the novel will soon imply are his "family." Here we discover that he is replacing a dead man, Kashkin. Pilar reads his future in his hand; more hints of coming disaster will follow. That night Jordan sleeps in his sleeping bag out under the cold alpine stars with Maria. In the morning he goes on a long walk with Pilar and Maria, and meets another major character, El Sordo.

Mann's book opens with Hans Castorp on a train climbing a steep mountain. At the train station he meets his cousin, the soldier Joachim, and together they take a carriage up to the sanatorium. In Joachim, standing in "Military position, heels together," at the station—along with the uniformed concierge (there for Hans's luggage), a former soldier who limps because his "knee-pan has been removed"—we begin to get the military motif that runs *throughout* the novel like a constant minor melody.[20]

(Perhaps it is only a coincidence, but it is interesting to note that one of Jordan's educators in Madrid is a German officer named Hans; two pages after the introduction of Hans, we learn that, while fighting in the Sierras, Jordan and others "held out in the Sanitarium firing from the windows" [*FBT*, pp. 234–36].)

At the sanatorium, a family-like place as it will turn out, Hans discovers that his room had been made free two days before, when its former occupant died. He too is replacing a dead person. This is one of the early omens that his stay will be more than three weeks, and may end in death. Later, Hans will view his hand under an X-ray machine and will be shocked at the sudden recognition of his own mortality. Pilar's reading death in the hand of Robert Jordan is a similar incident.

After being settled in his room, Hans is taken by his cousin to the dining hall, where we begin to get to know some of the novel's other characters. During his first night Hans lies out on the balcony of his room in a sleeping robe under the alpine stars. Before sleeping he enjoys the best thing in his life, his beloved Maria (his cigar), to whom (or which) he is "wed." (The beloved of the soldier Joachim, the blond Marjusa, is another "Maria," as he points out to Hans—which may suggest that Hans and Joachim are in a sense psychological doubles, as are the fearful Kashkin and the idealistic Lt. Berrendo, both blonds, of the blond Robert Jordan.) As the novel progresses we often find Hans out on his balcony at night, wrapped in his heavy sleeping robe, going over the "whole mass of his life," remembering, meditating—all part of his education—alone with his Maria.

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Chapter 2 is a flashback to Castorp's former life (much of this flashback concerns his grandfather; Jordan's memories of his grandfather come late in his story), from childhood up to the time he decides to visit Joachim at the Berghof for three weeks. (Early in Jordan's story we get a flashback to his meeting with Golz and his reasons for going to the mountain cave of the guerrillas.) The next day Hans, like Jordan on his first full day, goes for a long walk (with his cousin) and meets Settembrini, who will emerge as a major figure in the novel.

That evening in the dining hall Hans first becomes aware of Clavdia Chauchat—"upon whom illness had conferred such a degree of freedom"—the "sensual and passive" blond whom he will soon love passionately. (And of course past events have conferred upon Jordan's "passive" Maria an unwonted freedom.) Clavdia Chauchat is a kind of free-spirited gypsy—she is more than once associated with the Spanish gypsy girl Carmen, who loves and loses a soldier. Chauchat means "hot cat." Jordan refers to Maria as a cat, a furry animal, and most often as "rabbit."

So, in outline form, the novels begin with many similarities (though Mann's flashback to his young hero's former life is much longer than Hemingway's), so many that we may suspect that Mann's book gave Hemingway a formal beginning: the heroes climb a steep mountainside and near the top they meet someone (Pablo, Joachim), then continue their climb to the "family setting" place where they will stay. We discover that each is replacing a person who had recently died; later there are other bad omens. Then they have a meal and meet other important characters. Their first night (and throughout their stories) they enjoy their Maria, meditate, and sleep out under the stars in their sleeping bags. The next day they go for a long walk and meet other important story characters. Both books continue similarly: with flashbacks to earlier stages of the hero's education; the student-auditor hero being *lectured* to by others; intense, shocking experiences; then, his education-life completed, the hero descends the mountain to meet death.

There are other similarities at the beginning; each book opens realistically and then tends to move into a kind of interior, subjective condition. Also, each book begins in "real" time and later moves into a subjective narrative time.

When they stop along the way to El Sordo's hideout on the first full day, Pilar tells Jordan and Maria the horrible story of the murder of the Fascist villagers. (There are only a few brief shocking tales in Mann's book: for example, the story of the crucifixion and burning of Naphta's

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father, the story of the dying child visited by the priest, remarks about corpses brought down from a sanatorium higher up in the mountains on sleds.) Clearly Pilar's story is intended to seem dreamlike: it is a major step in Jordan's education toward a philosophy of love, and it has certain similarities with the most important step in the education of Hans, his dream in the snowstorm.

Pilar's dreamlike story of ritual murder, concluding with a drunken slaughter in a church, suggests to Jordan the brutality underlying the ideals of the Republican cause, and the dark forces that reside in man in general. Hans Castorp's dream of a happy island people turns into a drunken, ritualistic slaughter of a child outside a church. His dream in the snowstorm suggests to him the brutality and madness beneath the surface of civilization, the dark forces that reside in mankind—the underside of Settembrini's humanist gospel of reason and good works (not unlike Jordan's gospel of Duty)—and leads to his life-affirming "conversion." But as suggested earlier, Hans's conversion does not eradicate his essential sympathy with death; indeed, his conversion seems to give him a high-minded reason for going to meet death on the battlefield. Jordan's three-day conversion is not so dissimilar.

Before reaching El Sordo's, Jordan thinks that Maria is like a dream of the film star Garbo come alive. Castorp's past dreams of Pribislav Hippe come true in the person of Clavdia. Maria and Clavdia are both old, recurring dreams come miraculously alive.

At the meeting with El Sordo Jordan realizes that the guerrillas, who have seen no action in three months, are out of touch with the war; they are withdrawn from *time*, motion, the change that has been going on in the war below. They lie in a hermetic (one of Mann's words) atmosphere, "dying of boredom" one of the guerrillas says, though they "eat very well" (meals are a major time killer at the Berghof). Until they saw the morning planes, they had not realized the changes going on in the war. Now they must get involved, and the logic of the story (and the war itself) implies that they will soon die. They are among the soon-to-die, the virtually moribund, living on a hermetic, removed mountaintop. Also, there is a suggestion of sickness among the guerrillas. They are sick (or rotten) from a lack of action, Pilar says. Pablo is "sick" (*FBT*, p. 32) with longing for Maria and—though he once killed more than the "bubonic plague" (*FBT*, p. 26)—perhaps he is sick with a fear of death, too. After her experience in the barbershop, Maria (who is, like Catherine Barkley, a little "mad" when she first meets her lover) may be infertile. (But the entire country is sick, ravaged, infertile,

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and a little mad.) One of the gypsies calls the cave an insane asylum, and Anselmo calls it a palace of fear.[21]

Mann's book features the same basic situation. Disease is of course a constant metaphor in the novel. At the Berghof we find a "family" of the moribund (even the doctors are sick), an "international bridge" (Mann's words) in the "service of the cure," young people mostly, who have come from all over the world to take up the "predominantly horizontal," temporarily and for many permanently in the local graveyard. They are stagnating and bored—rather than rabbit stew, it is "soup everlasting"—with nothing to do but find ways to make time pass. They live in an estranged, hermetic atmosphere, cut off from the flow of *time* and events on the flatland. Thus they do not realize war is coming, but when it does, it will touch them, too.

After leaving El Sordo's, Jordan and Maria make love in the mountain meadow, and feel the earth move. The implication (here and elsewhere) is that he loves Maria more than he could love anyone in a normal situation, because of the constant proximity of death. In Mann's book we are told that Hans Castorp experiences a depth of passion and love for Clavdia that would never have been possible on the flatland, because of the nearness of death and the estranged mountaintop setting.

After this Jordan meditates on the relativity of time (completing a seventy-year life in seventy hours), as he will again on his final night. There are two long excursuses on the relativity of time in Mann's book.

Before Jordan, Maria, and Pilar reach the cave, it begins to snow. It had been hot the previous day and now, in late May, comes a snowstorm, which Jordan can hardly believe. In Mann's book the snowstorm comes in August, which Hans finds equally shocking. In both novels the unseasonable snowstorm is a metaphor for the relativity of time (for example, there are three "seasons" in Hemingway's book, summer, winter, and thawing spring in three days) and for the confusion of the normal sense of time. Also, it is another factor among many in each book contributing to the estrangement of atmosphere of these magic mountaintop locales, these places beyond the "line" of the "real" world.

On his second morning, Jordan wakes to shoot the rider on the big gray horse. And as he lies in wait with Agustín for the coming of more horsemen, Agustín says that for him " 'there is no stronger feeling' " in life than the lust to kill. A possible source (there is no way of knowing for certain, of course) of this comment is Naphta, the militaristic little "Spanish Jesuit," as Mann calls him, who says that in killing man

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gratifies "'his heart's deepest wish.'" Naphta, the proto-Fascist, the instinct worshiper, says that what the world needs now is a good dose of terror.

The age demanding terror is something we find in the Yeatsian motif buried in Hemingway's book: the rough beast, newly born, that is slouching toward Madrid, eventually, and the birth of Fascism, in Spain, and finally world revolution. As Naphta warns the humanist Settembrini, not all revolutions end in democracy. The next revolution may be worldwide, and end in the iron rule of totalitarianism.

By his final night, Jordan has gone through many "years" of experience and education. "'I have learned much from thee,'" he says to Maria, as he has learned much from Pilar, Pablo, and the others (*FBT*, p. 380). When he wakes from his dream in the snowstorm, Hans thinks "I have learned much from 'those up here.'"[22]

On this final night, Jordan also thinks: "I have learned much about life *in these four days*; *more*, I think, *than in all the other time*" (*FBT*, p. 380; italics added). Castorp says to Settembrini that his stay in the mountains "'has given me *more* food for thought *in these ten months than . . . in all the years before*'" down on the flatland (*MM*, p. 376; italics added).

Jordan's final night meditations on time and learning begin with him looking at his watch: "But as he watched the minute hand he found he could almost check its motion with his concentration"—an evocative image that may have come from Mann's book. Toward the story's end, after becoming conscious again of "real" time and preparatory to descending the mountain, Hans looks at his pocket watch, and "watching the second-hand, essayed to hold time by the tail, to cling to and prolong the passing moments"—as Jordan is obviously trying to do on this final night.

After blowing up the bridge the next morning, Jordan is wounded and laid against a tree. Then we get the scene of his "family" gathered about what is very much like his deathbed; and we must emphasize again that they are a disguised version of his boyhood family, and he is the son. This "deathbed" scene, with Pablo, Maria, and Pilar hovering over the wounded "son," Maria and Pilar crying, is in its essentials similar to the most moving scene in Mann's book: the death of the good soldier Joachim, with his crying mother and cousin Hans standing at his bedside (*MM*, pp. 534–39).

Previous to this, but still toward the end of his life, Joachim had come up with some uncharacteristically advanced insights, which indicated a "certain heightening of his nature" (*MM*, p. 542). The alchemistical heightening begins much earlier for Hans, of course, and

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this heightening process in both young men causes them to speed through the years, as it does Robert Jordan.

In the deathbed scene of Joachim we encounter the novel's most evocative image of the acceleration of time and the completion of a lifetime in a few days, which of course is what we have in Hemingway's book. Joachim has grown the beginnings of a beard in the final few days, "the beard of a soldier in the field" (Robert Jordan too has the few days' beginning of a beard).

> But because of this beard Joachim had suddenly grown from a stripling to a ripe man—though perhaps not because of it alone. He was living fast, his life whirred away like the mechanism of a watch; he passed at a gallop through stages not granted him to reach; and in the last four-and-twenty hours became a grey old man. (*MM*, p. 537)

The pathetic and soldierly death of the "knight" Joachim would probably have appealed to Hemingway, who more than once considered entitling a novel *A New Slain Knight*. Also, the impressive image of the accelerating clock seems especially pertinent to Hemingway's book, where accelerating time, and the hero's watch, are so basic. Jordan gallops through the "years" because he quickly learns so much, new and intense experiences following one another rapidly. Early in the book he thinks:

> I suppose it is possible to live as full a life in seventy hours as in seventy years; granted that your life has been full up to the time that the seventy hours start and that you have reached a certain age. (*FBT*, p. 166)

Time is subjective and relative; and he seems to see things in terms of differential calculus (something an engineer would know about). His thoughts suggest that he will learn not at a steady pace but at an accelerating rate as the novel progresses—so by the story's conclusion he can say: "I was learning fast there at the end."

Jordan wonders at the end "if you keep on learning or if there is only a certain amount each man can understand." By story's end he has learned his certain amount—that which he had been "programmed" to learn in a seventy-year life—thus (like Joachim) he in a sense becomes a gray old man.

Joachim approaches death in full consciousness and "in harmony with himself." The point is made that he dies for honor's sake. "'Field of honor, you know,'" the Hofrat says. "'Honor was the death of him'" (*MM*, p. 538). Jordan gets himself "completely integrated" as he prepares for death; and he too dies for the sake of duty and honor.

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Saying good-bye to Maria, Jordan experiences a sense of déjà vu. He had not felt this young since the time as a boy in Montana when he had said good-bye to his father at the train station, and his father, after a few high-minded remarks, had kissed him and wept. Going off to the war, Hans is accompanied to the train station by Settembrini, a father figure he has now outgrown. At the station Settembrini kisses him on both cheeks, which takes Hans "no little aback," then, after a high-minded little speech, weeps, as the train pulls away.

When Jordan, now wounded, makes his second departure from Maria, he tells her essentially that where she goes he will go, too. In Mann's book Valentine's song from Gounod's *Faust*—"the soldierly prayer of the hero departing for the field of honor"—has a great deal of meaning for Hans: "If God should summon me away / Thee I would watch and guard alway / O Marguerite!" Hans Castorp will soon be departing for the battlefield and death, and the "thee" he fantasizes looking down on protectingly after he dies is apparently Clavdia.

Jordan's final piece of learning comes near the story's end. "There's no *one* thing that's true. It's all true": the things of life and the things of death (Hemingway's emphasis). This is what Hans learns during the snowstorm, when he realizes that he must balance the claims of life and those of death. And he can, for man is the "lord of counter-positions" (*MM*, p. 496). But of course neither hero attains this balance. For both of them the lure of death is stronger than the claims of life.

Each novel ends in much the same way: with the camera pulling back, distancing itself from the hero, who is on the field of battle about to perish.

Other important similarities between these two books are the knightly romance and fairy-tale dimensions, and also the relativity of time, a matter not only of theme but of narrative time, too.

Hans Castorp is a kind of Perceval questing for knowledge, while his cousin, Lt. Joachim Ziemssen, is an honorable and duty-loving knight, a "purely formal" man, of a more soldierly type. Robert Jordan—in a sense, a combination of the meditative, death-inclined Hans and the soldier Joachim—is a knightlike figure who has traveled to a distant land to fight for a Cause just and true; not only does he fight against the great beast that is laying waste the land, but he is on a quest for knowledge, too (he plans to write a book someday). And like Joachim, he is an honorable, dutiful soldier-knight. It has been pointed out before that Hans Castorp finds an echo in the German knight Tannhäuser (of Wagner's opera), who went to a magic mountain and there gained love and knowledge, and afterward attempted to expiate

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his sins.[23] Robert Jordan and his trip to a magic mountain suggest something similar, though it is probably his father's great sin that he feels he must eradicate.

Mann's novel implies a fairy tale of a young man who wanders into the precincts of a magical mountain setting and there undergoes a miraculous education; or, to use Mann's simile, Hans falls into a kind of seven-year sleep, has strange dreams, and finally awakens with new knowledge. It has been suggested that Hans's waking near the story's end from his long sleep and dream (like the Seven-Year Sleeper of German legend) is comparable to the Rip Van Winkle story.[24] We find a hint of the same story in Hemingway's book. When Jordan arrives at the cave he is given wine; later one of the gypsies (Rafael, the "time waster") goes off with Jordan's "marvelous chronometer," and by this point in the story, time has become subjective and accelerated.

But Hemingway's book has other implied fairy-tale dimensions. Our young hero is led by a strange old man up a mountain to a place of mysticism and omens, and gypsies living in forests and caves, a magic mountain atmosphere, in which he undergoes a miraculously speeded-up education, flying through the "years." In a cave in the mountains he finds a precious, transforming gold—the golden-haired Maria, who was found "in the rocks" by the gypsies—a witchlike mother figure and seven "dwarfs" (Pablo and his men number seven); or else, Jordan and Maria are two middle-class orphans who have fled to the woods. There they find peasant mother and father figures, and receive an education in the gypsies' mysterious and (for Jordan) true brotherhood.

Mann's magic mountain concept naturally calls for allusions to the world of romance and fairy tale. So if Hemingway took from him, as he seems to have done, the idea of using a strange, transforming mountaintop setting for his novel of accelerated education, then we need not be surprised to see the outlines of romance and fairy tale in the novel. But Hemingway's biggest debt to Mann's novel may be in the application of the concept of the relativity of time to narrative time; that is, in the use of various kinds of time, especially the fairy-tale-like idea of speeding through the "years."

There are three "times" in Mann's book: realistic time, a hermetic out-of-timeness, and a speeding through the "years" (content time); these last two, of course, are subjective times. *The Magic Mountain* begins in realistic or clock time. The hero's first full day (Chapter 3) is presented in almost minute-by-minute fashion. But after this, things change. After a few months, time becomes hermetic; it seems to move not at all—the monotonous daily round (month after month, year after

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year) of soup everlasting. But on another subjective level, the years fly past for the hero, so that he becomes an "old man" in seven brief years. The years, many "years," pass so quickly because of their content. And so the hero, in his alchemistically heightened state, experiences and learns what it would normally take a lifetime to learn.

These three narrative times occur in Hemingway's novel—and only in this one, of all his novels. We noticed that the guerrillas live a hermetic existence, cut off from time's passage. But when Jordan comes to the mountains—with his watch and his directions to blow up the bridge at a precise time—he in a sense brings real time with him. The planes of the first morning emphasize the point. So the novel begins in real, clock time; and the early descriptions and events are realistic enough, compared with later events.

But at some point we begin to encounter, along with the regular beat of clock time, subjective time: perhaps when the gypsy "time waster" goes off with the hero's watch, or, as some critics suggest, when Jordan and Maria make love in the meadow and time seems to stop for them. Then the story moves into a kind of mythic time, or an eternal-now (essentially comparable to Mann's hermetic time).

But as the novel progresses the reader is caught up in another kind of subjective time. Time as the hero experiences it—subjective narrative time—speeds up, and does so at what seems to be a mathematically accelerating rate. It speeds up in the sense that the hero experiences an increasingly rapid succession of new, intense, shocking events; time speeds up in the sense that Jordan goes through many "years" of experience and—in his "alchemistically" heightened state of mind and emotions—education. This fairy-tale-like (or perhaps we should say, dreamlike: dreams are a major motif in both novels[25]) acceleration of time and education—this application of the concept of the relativity of time to narrative time, subjective narrative time—is new in Hemingway's fiction, and likely it came from Mann's book.

Herman Weigand—who says that Hans Castorp "matures at a supernaturally rapid rate"—maintains that time in *The Magic Mountain* moves at a "progressively faster rate," finally approaching "a state of pure, motionless duration"; time undergoes a "progressive foreshortening."[26] Precisely the same descriptive terms are used in the two most influential critical discussions of the time dimension of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.[27]

So both young heroes climb to the top of what turns out to be a magic mountain, and there they undergo an accelerated education. Their education is stimulated by passionate love, the nearness of death,

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and their own deep inclination toward the peace of death—the "ultimate ridding of the ego," in Jordan's ambiguous words—as well as a rapid series of intense learning experiences. Jordan is in an "over-sensitized" state of mind and emotions (*FBT*, p. 381); the "actual adventures" of Hans consist of an "alchemical 'keying up,'" Mann says. In this enhanced environment and highly sensitized state of mind and emotions, they learn in a student-auditor format, as well. Then, having rushed through the "years" toward death, they finally descend their mountain to the place where they will at last meet death. The lure of death is stronger than the claims of duty and life. And in both books the relativity of time is not only a theme for meditation, but also a matter of subjective narrative time.

The Magic Mountain provides a metaphor for a sick Europe on the eve of world war, and it implies a cultural death-wish. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in a sense updates the metaphor, and it too implies a cultural death-wish, suggested not only by our idealistic hero's subterranean inclination for the sweet release of death, but also by the buried allusions to Yeats's "The Second Coming," that is, to his myth of the end of a historical cycle—with Leda in the barber shop and the rough beast of Fascism, seen across the gorge, slouching toward Madrid—a historical cycle that can no more be stopped than the beginning of an offensive, once its inertia has been overcome. There is nothing our Christ-like hero can do about it.[28] The similarities between these two encyclopedic, twentieth-century epics seem too many and profound to be a matter of coincidence.

[1] Linda Wagner, *Hemingway and Faulkner* (East Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1974), p. 105.

[2] Early in the story Jordan says that he will form his judgments after the war, "and there would be plenty of material to draw them from. There was plenty already. There was a little too much sometimes." *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (New York: Scribner's, 1940), p. 136. Further references are to this edition and are cited in the text as *FBT*.

[3] Jeffrey Meyers notes the likely influence of *War and Peace* and, especially, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (*Hemingway: A Biography* [New York: Harper, 1984], pp. 335–36). See also Kevin S. Larsen, "Rounds with Mr. Cervantes: *Don Quijote* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*," *Orbis Litterarum*, 43 (1988), 108–28.

[4] Carlos Baker, ed., *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters, 1917–1961* (New York: Scribner's, 1981), p. 176. Hereafter cited as *Selected Letters*.

[5] See William Adair, "*For Whom the Bell Tolls* as Family Romance," *Arizona Quarterly*, 41, No. 4 (Winter 1985), 329–36.

[6] *Selected Letters*, pp. 481, 493.

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[7] Bernard Oldsey, *Hemingway's Hidden Craft* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 175–76.

[8] Michael S. Reynolds, *Hemingway's Reading, 1916–1940: An Inventory* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981), p. 296.

[9] *Selected Letters*, p. 297.

[10] Ernest Hemingway, *Green Hills of Africa* (New York: Scribner's, 1935), pp. 19, 108.

[11] Lillian Ross, *Portrait of Hemingway* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), p. 36.

[12] Carlos Baker, *Hemingway: The Writer as Artist* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1952), pp. 267, 275.

[13] This idea of an accelerated education is not entirely new to Hemingway. In 1925 he told Fitzgerald that war is a valuable experience for a writer because it "groups the maximum of material and speeds up the action and brings out all sorts of stuff that normally you have to wait a lifetime to get"; *Selected Letters*, p. 176. Later he said that a great artist learns in a brief span of time "what it takes the ordinary man a lifetime to know" (*Death in the Afternoon* [New York: Scribner's, 1932], p. 100).

[14] Pilar and Karkov are Jordan's principal lecturers; but the examples of Golz, Pablo, Anselmo, and El Sordo are important. Settembrini and Naphta "lecture" Hans extensively; the examples of Joachim, Clavdia, and Peeperkorn are also important to his education.

[15] Concerning Hans's death, Mann says his chances are slim, but he leaves the question open. But most commentators agree that Hans dies on the field of battle: for example, Henry Hatfield, *From the "Magic Mountain"* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979), p. 48; Ignace Feuerlicht, *Thomas Mann* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1979), p. 42.

[16] See Hermann J. Weigand, *Thomas Mann's Novel "Der Zauberberg"* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1964), pp. 88–95.

[17] *Selected Letters*, pp. 513–14.

[18] The same strong grandfather and weak father contrast is featured in both novels; also, there is a parallel incident of some importance: Hans's grandfather used to display for young Hans the family christening bowl (with the names of his ancestors engraved on it), a solemn and death-associated memory for Hans later in life. Jordan's grandfather used to show Robert his Civil War pistol, which became for Jordan a solemn memory later as it was the gun his father used to commit suicide.

At his grandfather's funeral, the boy Hans encounters not only the smell of flowers but that of the slightly decaying corpse; thus in later years, the "alien and yet so familiar odor," the smell of death, strangely attracts him. The smell of death-to-come (Pilar knows it and tries to relate it to Jordan) is of some importance in Jordan's story.

[19] For a well-known discussion of Jordan's "unconscious death wish," see Philip Young's *Hemingway: A Reconsideration* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 107–08.

[20] We often hear about the patients being in "the service of the cure," the "troops of guests" the hero meets while out walking, and the "duels" of Settembrini and Naphta. Castorp's visiting uncle is an "ambassador" who comes "like a spy," Joachim folds his blanket in "regulation manner," and so on. Two

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chapter sections—"An Attack, and a Repulse" and "A Soldier, and Brave"—have military titles.

[21] Disease or sickness as metaphor for the world's condition appears elsewhere in Hemingway's fiction. Georgette of *The Sun Also Rises* says she's sick, but then, "'Everybody's sick.'" In *A Farewell to Arms* Rinaldi (who thinks he has syphilis) says, "'What if I have it. Everybody has it. The whole world's got it.'" Notice also that in Hemingway's story two characters (Kashkin and Jordan's father) commit suicide, while Jordan is tempted to do the same at the story's end. In Mann's book Naphta and Peeperkorn commit suicide.

[22] Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Knopf, 1927), p. 495. Further references are to this edition and are cited in the text as *MM*.

[23] See Weigand, *Thomas Mann's Novel*, p. 97, and Feuerlicht, *Thomas Mann*, p. 29. Hemingway had a reasonably good knowledge of opera; see Michael S. Reynolds, *The Young Hemingway* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 155.

[24] Weigand, *Thomas Mann's Novel*, p. 97. Many commentators note the fairy-tale dimensions in *The Magic Mountain*.

[25] As we noticed, Hans dreams during the blizzard, he dreams of Hippe, and Clavdia is that dream come alive, and there are many dreamlike scenes and states of mind in the novel. Discussing "contentual time," Mann notes how years can seem to pass by in a dream (*MM*, p. 542), and he implies that Hans is like the Seven-Year Sleeper of German legend (*MM*, p. 544). Again, Pilar's story has a dreamlike edge to it, and Maria is a dream of Garbo come alive. Three or four times Jordan says he feels as if he is in a dream; allusions to dreams occur some twenty times in the novel.

[26] Weigand, *Thomas Mann's Novel*, pp. 98, 14–20.

[27] F. I. Carpenter, "Hemingway Achieves the Fifth Dimension," in *Ernest Hemingway: A Collection of Criticism*, ed. Arthur Waldhorn (New York: Farrar, 1972), pp. 83–91, and Earl Rovit, *Ernest Hemingway* (New York: Twayne, 1963), pp. 80–93.

[28] The basic idea in this paragraph was suggested to me by Robert O. Stephens.

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The Aborted Phone Call: Hasterer's Role in and out of *The Trial*

Henry B. Wonham

In a fit of confused agitation during his arrest, Joseph K. considers asking for professional advice from an influential friend: "at last he came to a stand before the inspector's table. 'Hasterer, the lawyer, is a personal friend of mine,' he said. 'May I telephone to him?'"[1] In accordance with the court's policy throughout the novel, and like the parabolic doorkeeper, the inspector offers no resistance beyond the vaguely threatening comment that such a telephone call would be senseless, "unless you have some private business of your own to consult him about" (pp. 17, 22). K. objects violently to the inspector's own apparent senselessness, but at the same time he abandons his intention to contact Hasterer:

> "What sense would there be in telephoning to a lawyer when I am supposed to be under arrest? All right, I won't telephone." "But do telephone if you want to," replied the inspector . . . "please do telephone." "No, I don't want to now," said K., going over to the window. (p. 18)[2]

K.'s childlike reversal appears simply to be an early expression of his characteristic obstinacy, but this brief exchange with the inspector, and Hasterer's subsequent disappearance from the narrative, actually describe one of the novel's major thematic conflicts in microcosm. For K. seems on the surface to be acting sensibly and reasonably when he considers appealing for legal assistance, and the inspector's response consequently appears to represent an affront to K.'s rational understanding of the arrest. Yet Hasterer is not simply an "advocate," as the Muirs have rendered him in translation; he is a *Staatsanwalt*, literally a state attorney, whose expertise by definition falls on the prosecutorial side of

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the law.[3] Hence the irony of K.'s aborted telephone call which, somewhat diluted in translation, foreshadows the ironic pattern of his handling of the case as a whole: what appears to be an appeal for defensive assistance is simultaneously a summons to the prosecuting authorities. K. consciously maintains the belief that his attempt to contact Hasterer is rooted in a spirit of defiance, even though his inexplicably sudden abandonment of the attempt exposes to the reader, at least, a hint that more complicated motives underlie his intention. Indeed, the inspector is perfectly warranted in pointing out the senselessness of K.'s proposed phone call, which, once abandoned, reveals not only his conflicting impulses toward defiance and submission, but his fateful inability to act decisively in either direction, as well.

As numerous critics, beginning with Wilhelm Emrich, have pointed out, K.'s refusal consciously to acknowledge his powerful latent desire for submission to the court establishes a setting for the psychological conflict that lies at the heart of *The Trial*.[4] Not surprisingly, though, Kafka failed to sustain this delicate balance between conscious volition and latent desire in several of the chapters that he eventually left unfinished, including the episode in which Hasterer was to have entered the novel in person. In the fragmentary chapter "*Staatsanwalt*," which E. M. Butler translates with appropriate literalness as "Prosecuting Counsel," Joseph K. is described as a frequent dinner guest among the eminent officials of the court.

> In spite of his knowledge of men and the experience of the world which K. had acquired during his long service in the bank, the company he met at dinner in the evenings had always impressed him as particularly calculated to inspire respect, and he never denied in his inmost thoughts that it was a great honor for him to belong to such a society. (p. 296)[5]

This society, which never comes fully into view in the chapters Kafka considered finished, consists "almost exclusively of judges, prosecuting counsel, and lawyers," "learned and eminent men who wielded a certain power and whose recreation consisted in exerting themselves to find the solution to thorny problems which had only the slightest connection with everyday life" (pp. 296–97, pp. 282–83). Their remoteness from the concerns of everyday life suggests that the lawyers and judges with whom K. socializes in the evenings are not from the Palace of Justice, the "ordinary court," as K. puts it, but from the attics (p. 118, p. 116). They are the same shadowy men about whom Huld, in the "Lawyer" section of the novel, explains that, "they did not

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have any right understanding of human relations," for "their remoteness kept the officials from being in touch with the populace" (p. 143, p. 148).

In direct contrast to the "thorny questions" that enthrall the judges and advocates, K.'s intellectual life at the bank is rooted in "practical experience . . . acquired at first hand, which is never the case at a lawyer's desk" (p. 298, p. 284). K. becomes particularly intimate with the most powerful figure in this judicial society, prosecuting counsel Hasterer, a "giant of a man," with whom K. is in the habit of retiring after dinner for brandy, cigars, and "abstruse speculation," a combination that on at least one occasion leaves K. "fuddled" during his walk home (p. 302, p. 287). K.'s growing intimacy with members of the court goes unnoticed at the bank until the morning after his particularly late night with Hasterer, when, during the course of a "business conversation," the bank manager mentions having seen K. the night before, walking arm in arm with the prosecuting counsel. The manager, who is a "confirmed invalid with a chronic cough," suddenly reclaims both his former vitality and his apparently waning authority over the rebellious employee:

> K. was subjugated by the manager in such moments. . . . [the manager] seemed actually to have forgotten K.'s position at the bank and spoke to him as if he were a child or an ignorant young man applying for a post. . . . (p. 303)[6]

The fragment ends with a passage that distinctly echoes Kafka's earlier punitive fantasy, "The Judgment," in which an unfaithful son is punished for attempting to defy his supposedly invalid father: " 'I knew nothing whatsoever about this friendship,' said the manager; and only a faint friendly smile softened the severity of the words" (p. 304, p. 298).

The episode concludes prematurely, before the vindictive father figure has passed judgment on his rebellious son, and one wonders if Kafka did not abandon the chapter here because he recognized that this was old ground. In forging a personal relationship with the court, and with the prosecuting arm of the court specifically, K. has begun to externalize his latent frustration over the arid and spiritually deadening intellectual life of the bank. He is drawn to the court not simply "in spite of his knowledge of men and the experience of the world" which he had acquired at the bank, as the opening line of the unfinished chapter maintains, but precisely because his exclusive residence in the bank's realm of practical, "hands on," experience has alienated K. both from his family and from his own spiritual and unconscious life. Hence K.'s friendship with the revered Hasterer, who is in the habit of probing

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with friendly interest into K.'s personal life, is a milder form of the arrest itself: it puts an end to the bank manager's total domination over K.'s conscious life.

K.'s "befuddlement" as he returns from Hasterer's home in the fragment is the consequence of his willingness to engage in a degree of self-reflection that is alien to the straightforward and goal-directed mode of thought and discourse that he associates with his success at the bank, and to which he clings so adamantly in the completed chapters of the novel. Only in a moment of weakness and confusion during the arrest does K. appear on the verge of consciously reaching out to the prosecutor, and even then his duplicitous intent is concealed by a false assumption that Hasterer must be connected to the "ordinary court," and that an appeal for his involvement would be a rational and sensible response to circumstances. Kafka invites the reader to share in K.'s delusion by withholding from the completed chapters any explicit indication that Hasterer might belong to the attic court system rather than to the Palace of Justice. In the deleted fragment, on the other hand, both K. and the reader are manifestly aware that his affection for the otherworldly court officials stands in conflict with his duties and aspirations as chief clerk of the bank, with the result that a rejuvenated bank manager recognizes the challenge to his authority and, like Georg's father in "The Judgment," subjugates his unfaithful employee with the severity of his words.

The problem with the plan of the chapter, as Kafka later realized, is that it makes K. conscious of his desire, if not his motivation, to enter the law. And this consciousness, were it to be introduced into the novel, would drastically alter the structure of *The Trial* as a whole. What Kafka may not have fully appreciated when he began "Prosecuting Counsel" is that the fundamental difference between *The Trial* and "The Judgment" lies in the distinction between internal and external psychological conflict. On one hand, Georg represses inner knowledge in order to prepare himself for an imminent power struggle with an exterior figure of authority. That conflict, which results in the father's complete victory over his son, is the focal point of the story. On the other hand, while Joseph K. thinks of his trial in oedipal terms as a struggle against external authority, in fact the scene of conflict in the novel is K.'s own mind, where latent desires encounter a severely repressive consciousness.[7] The figure of external authority, which offers tangible and insurmountable resistance in "The Judgment," has been abstracted into the novel's two murky hierarchies, while the central conflict in *The Trial* has become an internal struggle between K.'s

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conscious desire to defy the court and his unconscious, but equally strong, desire to submit to its authority.

This process of internalization is threatened in "Prosecuting Counsel," where K.'s otherwise latent desire for union with the court is consciously expressed through his affection for Hasterer and the society of court officials. Unlike the edited and completed chapters, here K.'s consciousness of his desire shifts the scene of conflict from an internal to an external struggle between the hero and domineering authority figures, like Hasterer and the bank manager. In effect, had Kafka opened the novel with "Prosecuting Counsel," as Herman Uyttersprot claims he intended to, the author would have found himself writing a novel-length version of "The Judgment."[8]

Whether or not his reasoning corresponded to this line of argument, Kafka left the fragment unfinished and proceeded virtually to eliminate both Hasterer and the bank manager from the remaining chapters of *The Trial*. But the substance of "Prosecuting Counsel"—that is, K.'s desire to exchange a banker's "hands on" experience for a prosecutor's "abstruse speculation"—was not abandoned; K.'s desire was merely excised from the text, and thus from K.'s consciousness. Walter Sokel has pointed out that Kafka's method of editing out words, passages, and entire chapters frequently resembled his protagonist's method of repressing undesirable knowledge: passages that disappear from the text often become latent truths that emerge unexpectedly through minor details and irrational acts and statements.[9] Hence, in the completed chapters, the society of court officials never impresses K. as "particularly calculated to inspire respect," as is the case in "Prosecuting Counsel," and Hasterer himself is left waiting for a phone call that might summon his presence in the novel. Indeed, consciously K. is outraged rather than seduced by the abstruseness of the legal system, at one point objecting to his arrest: "This is sheer nonsense!" (p. 17, p. 22).

Of course, from the perspective of his everyday existence at the bank, K. is perfectly correct, for the officials lack "any right understanding of human relations" (p. 148, p. 143), and the court as a whole bears "only the slightest connection with everyday life" (p. 297, p. 283). Yet what K. fails to acknowledge, except in the unfinished chapter, is that he possesses a powerful latent attraction for such *Unsinn*. His aggressive condescension toward the "intellectual poverty" of the warders (p. 12, p. 17), the "senile inquisitiveness" of the woman across the street (p. 5, p. 11), and the "senselessness" of the court's proceedings as a whole, only reflects the determination of his conscious

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facade to repress an inner desire. That desire never emerges explicitly in the completed chapters, but K. surreptitiously indulges his latent wish by becoming increasingly involved in the legal maneuvering of his case, eventually replacing Huld so that he can deal directly with the court. As with the proposed phone call, K.'s decision to dispense with the lawyer's services appears outwardly to be a defensive measure, yet it functions also as an invitation to the prosecuting authorities for direct scrutiny of the defendant. Despite his conscious and explicit disdain for the senseless proceedings of the court, K.'s actions throughout the novel betray his latent intention to play the role designated for Hasterer, that of *Staatsanwalt*, an intention of which K. himself is ignorant, but which the manufacturer ironically identifies: "For you are almost as good as a lawyer yourself. I'm always saying: The chief clerk is almost a lawyer. Oh, I have no anxiety about your case" (p. 171, p. 164).

The choice or pursuit of a career is a particularly potent symbolic act in virtually every one of Kafka's works. Characters like the commandant of "In the Penal Colony" and the hero of "A Hunger Artist" are largely defined by their professions, whereas others, like landsurveyor K. in *The Castle*, relentlessly seek the reassurance of an official position. Only one character in Kafka's entire opus, however, successfully changes careers in the sense that Joseph K. of *The Trial* secretly wishes to quit the worldly and rational hierarchy of the bank in order to enter its counterpart, the abstruse judicial hierarchy. In a short sketch entitled "The New Attorney," Alexander's old charger Bucephalus accomplishes such a feat by transforming his earlier life of heroic action into a life of contemplation: "Free, his flanks unpressed by the thighs of a rider, under a quiet lamp, far from the din of Alexander's battles, he reads and turns the pages of our old books."[10] This capacity to combine in a single life the extremes of pure engagement with the world and pure disengagement from it represented an ideal that Kafka considered humanly unattainable, and which, to be sure, no human character in his writings ever realizes. Bucephalus succeeds because he is part unreflective animal and part historical legend, both pure body and pure mind in one. Man, according to one of Kafka's aphorisms, is restricted to an ambiguous middle ground:

> He is a free and secure citizen of the world, for he is fettered to a chain which is long enough to give him the freedom of all earthly space, and yet only so long that nothing can drag him past the frontiers of the world. But simultaneously he is a free and secure citizen of Heaven as well, for he is fettered by a similarly designed heavenly chain. So that if he heads, say, for

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> the earth, his heavenly collar throttles him, and if he heads for Heaven, his earthly one does the same.[11]

Kafka found this sense of purgatorial limbo perfectly symbolized by the perpetual conflict between his writing and his duties at the Workers' Accident Insurance Institute. Unlike Bucephalus, he felt irreparably divided by these two "never-to-be-reconciled endeavors," which seemed to hold him like earthly and heavenly fetters.[12] In "My Visit to Dr. Steiner," he writes: "The smallest good fortune in one becomes a great misfortune in the other."

> If I have written something good one evening, I am afire the next day in the office and can bring nothing to completion. This back and forth continually becomes worse. Outwardly, I fulfill my duties satisfactorily in the office, not my inner duties, however, and every unfulfilled inner duty becomes a misfortune that never leaves.[13]

Writing satisfied Kafka's profound desire to "bolt the doors and windows against the world," but only temporarily, for the world always seemed to invade the mind's sanctuary by reminding one of responsibilities.[14] The Platonic ideal of a life in the universe of ideas remained as unattainable as the corresponding ideal of pure engagement with the world, exemplified only by legendary heroes of the past, like Alexander. "Today, as no one can deny, there is no more Alexander the Great," writes Kafka in "The New Attorney," and one might add that neither is there an ancient Academy dedicated to the contemplation of forms.[15] The modern human condition, as described in the parable, amounts to perpetual vacillation between the longing for both absolutes, "a horrible double life from which there is probably no escape but insanity."[16]

In *The Trial* Joseph K.'s smug air of superiority stems from a belief that he, like Bucephalus, has overcome the human dilemma that so preoccupied Kafka in his diaries and letters. Unlike Bucephalus' miraculous career change, though, K.'s apparent success has required no reconciliation of "never-to-be-reconciled endeavors." On the contrary, he has at least temporarily escaped the "double life" by forcing his Platonic urge beneath the level of consciousness, by striving earthward, oblivious to the heavenly fetters of Kafka's aphorism. With his arrest on the morning of his thirtieth birthday, K. reaches the limit of his heavenly chain, and he no longer succeeds entirely in repressing his latent Platonism. For that moment, he suffers the double life in earnest, vacillating over whether to indulge his conscious desire for ascendancy in the bank or his unconscious impulse toward fulfillment

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of an inner life, shut off from the "hands on," experiential world of the bank. The choice as expressed openly in "Prosecuting Counsel" is between faithful service toward the bank manager or allegiance to K.'s "*guter Freund*," the prosecutor Hasterer. With K.'s rejection of Hasterer during the arrest scene, and Kafka's equally significant suppression of the prosecutor throughout the rest of the novel, that choice becomes a latent psychological crisis rather than an external power play, and K.'s failure to choose definitively results in a confused approach to his trial, whereby his actions on behalf of the defense frequently serve the needs of the prosecution.

Indeed, K.'s conduct directly following the arrest reveals such a pronounced affinity for court tactics that it almost seems as if secretly he has received advice from the prosecuting counsel, despite his conscious decision not to invite Hasterer's participation in the trial. For example, it is K.'s hope and belief that the bank office will remain a bastion of the conscious will, a place where, as he says, "my mind is always on my work and so kept on the alert . . ." (p. 27, p. 31). Even before he makes this statement to Frau Grubach, however, K. demonstrates that his work for the bank is not the sole occupation of his office life. Earlier that day, the day of the arrest, he initiates a cautious defensive policy by inviting the three clerks, Rabensteiner, Kullich, and Kaminer, into his office "with no other purpose than to observe them" (p. 24, p. 28).

In adopting a strategy of passive surveillance of the court's functionaries, of course, K. has unwittingly duplicated the court's ongoing strategy toward him, which is announced by the inspector at K.'s first interview: "You are under arrest, nothing more. I was requested to inform you of this. I have done so, and I have also observed your reactions" (pp. 19–20, p. 24). Furthermore, K.'s approach to his trial plays directly into the hands of his alleged adversaries. For as Kafka points out in a deleted passage, K.'s invitation to the clerks makes it "easier for them to keep his own person under observation, which they had possibly been instructed to do . . ." (p. 319, p. 305). Right from the moment he rings his breakfast bell and unwittingly invites the warders into his room, K. confronts this peculiar effect of his vacillating desires: unconsciously, he seems actually to be working in complicity with the court, employing its methods against his conscious self. While consciously he abandons the phone call to Hasterer, unconsciously he summons the prosecution and even directs its handling of the case.

K.'s unacknowledged "double life" saps his strength and leads to an inevitable decline in his performance at the bank, as well as a significant

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shift in his attitude toward business relations. In fact, K. humiliates some of the bank's most important clients by forcing them to wait for hours while he contemplates his case. Rationalizing his neglect of responsibility as a temporary, but necessary preoccupation with his legal defense, K. fails to realize that precisely this neglect has turned his own office into a mirror image of the court offices. Even the murky atmosphere of the court seems to have penetrated the bank as K. peers from his desk into the waiting room, where "clients were dimly visible in the antechamber whenever the door opened, making deprecating bows to call attention to themselves, but uncertain whether they had been remarked or not . . ." (p. 254, p. 243). K. witnesses a parallel image during his tour of the attics, where the pitifully humble accused men patiently wait for interviews and information in the dimly lighted antechamber of the court offices. The accused men obsequiously rise from their wooden benches as K. and the usher pass, but they "did not stand quite erect, their backs remained bowed, their knees bent, they stood like street beggars" (p. 79, p. 81). Similarly, K.'s clients line the walls of his waiting room, sitting for hours on benches, "eager to seize the first chance of attracting K.'s attention" (p. 173, p. 166). K.'s contempt for his business clients grows more obvious as he becomes increasingly mired in his purported defense, until at last he employs the court's tactics of intimidation and humiliation at least as effectively as his counterparts in the judicial hierarchy. As with both the intended phone call and his earlier surveillance strategy, K.'s conscious defensive efforts actually gratify his unconscious desire to play the role of prosecuting attorney in his own office and at his own trial.

The duality of K.'s role in the legal proceedings is emphasized by subtle inversions that occur throughout the text. For example, early in the novel, K. at one point feels dwarfed by his warders, especially the enormous Willem, who "seemed to be consulting over his head with the other warder" (p. 7, p. 12). In a parallel passage, K. later experiences an almost identical sensation, only this time he is overtopped by his business associates, the assistant manager and the manufacturer, rather than by the court's functionaries: "it seemed to K. as if two giants of enormous size were negotiating above his head about himself" (p. 164, p. 156). The inversion is indicative less of a definite pattern than of K.'s vacillating efforts to gratify both his desire for business success and his conflicting wish to press on with the prosecution of his case. On one hand, in an effort to defend his position at the bank, K. abdicates whatever control he might have over his trial and so becomes helpless before even the court's meanest hirelings; on the other hand, his

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unconscious effort to play the part of Hasterer's ostensible protégé involves the abdication of his power at the bank. Without perceiving the threat inherent to Kafka's notion of the "double life"—indeed, without consciously acknowledging one half of that double life—K. blindly pursues his two careers at once.

In the face of this crippling double bind, which for Kafka left "probably no escape but insanity," K. remains defiantly optimistic. But his optimism is founded less on the hopeful example of Bucephalus, who resolves the "double life" through transformation, than on a crucial delusion about the nature of his situation. For K. not only fails to acknowledge that his two careers are as mutually exclusive as the atmospheres in which the bank and court officials operate; he actually views them as complementary. That belief is expressed in "Prosecuting Counsel" when K. declares that his growing intimacy with eminent members of the court "sooner or later might profit him in the bank" (p. 297, p. 283). Readers are more familiar with an alternative expression of the same belief, which echoes like a refrain throughout the novel:

> In a relatively short time he had managed to work himself up to his present high position in the bank and to maintain himself in that position and win recognition from everybody; surely if the abilities which had made this possible were to be applied to the unraveling of his own case, there was no doubt that it would go well. (p. 158)[17]

Kafka excised the first version of K.'s delusion—that his connection with the court might benefit his career at the bank—but he sustained to the end his hero's false conviction that the qualities which have brought success at the bank, like "common sense" and "presence of mind," will eventually prevail with the court as well (p. 22, p. 27). In fact, beginning on the morning of the arrest, K. repeatedly attempts to resolve his case with a firm, gentlemanly handshake, as he would a business transaction (p. 19, p. 24). The inspector at K.'s first interview refuses to take his hand, however, instead warning the accused of a "great delusion," which receives fuller expression from the narrator later in the novel: "This legal action was nothing more than a business deal such as he had often concluded to the advantage of the bank, a deal within which, as always happened, lurked various dangers which must simply be obviated" (p. 159, p. 152).

In adopting a business strategy in order to resolve a legal question, K. finds it more than ever necessary to ward off lapses of memory, concentration, and rationality. On numerous occasions he worries about his waning presence of mind, but K. is generally successful at avoiding

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extended lapses in his analytical approach to the case. In Titorelli's studio he reprimands himself for having temporarily been "absorbed against his will" by an interpretive impulse that leads him to speculate about the painter's depiction of the goddess of Justice. After an uncharacteristically reflective passage, "he began to reproach himself for having stayed so long without even touching the business that brought him" (p. 184, p. 177). That "business," of course, concerns the hero's desire to "understand his situation clearly," though K. fails to perceive that something approaching an understanding of his predicament can come only through precisely the sort of speculation and self-reflection that he repeatedly seeks to ward off (p. 7, p. 12).

In "Prosecuting Counsel" it becomes clear to K., through the severe words of the bank manager, that his emerging relationship with the court, and specifically his nocturnal visits with Hasterer, stand in direct conflict with his work at the bank. That knowledge is withheld from K. in the completed chapters, where his failure to recognize the conflict of "never-to-be-reconciled endeavors" becomes the essential substance of his delusion. He rejects the apparent defeatism of Block's literally valid admonition that "in these proceedings things are always coming up for discussion that are simply beyond reason," and relies instead on his qualities of common sense and perseverance to win him definite acquittal from the court (p. 217, p. 209). It never occurs to K. that the rational fortitude on which he pins all hope of winning his case is precisely what he must sacrifice in order to gratify his unconscious desire for entrance into the law.

Toward the end of the novel, K. again backs away from speculative insight that might hold more value for his case than the faithful exertions of his entire "ring of helpers" (p. 189, p. 182). After a lengthy exegesis of the priest's parable, K. makes a hasty departure from the cathedral, retreating to the old fortifications erected by his conscious intellect, because "the trains of thought into which it was leading him were unfamiliar, dealing with impalpabilities better suited to a theme for discussion among court officials than for him" (p. 277, p. 264). Indeed, trains of thought that lead away from, rather than toward, certainty are better suited to the court officials than to K., who, in the completed chapters, vigilantly guards against the sort of speculation that seems to attract him powerfully in "Prosecuting Counsel." Ingeborg Henel has remarked on the parallel structure of the cathedral scene and the initial arrest, noting that in both instances K. is called by a higher authority, who warns him to occupy his mind less with thoughts about innocence and to reflect more about himself.[18] One might add that K.'s aborted

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appeal to Hasterer during the arrest is motivated by a burgeoning, but finally repressed, impulse to call back, to answer the court in its own language of abstruse speculation, literally to quit the world of the bank and to accept the challenge of painstaking self-evaluation.

It is not clear in *The Trial* whether entrance into the Law would necessarily entail transcendence through death, as suggested in a fragmentary chapter, later published independently as "A Dream," or whether hope exists for the living transformation of a Bucephalus. It seems probable that the life of an accused man could never amount to more than the perils of "ostensible acquittal" and "indefinite postponement," two verdicts that aptly conform to the image of man perpetually suspended by earthly and heavenly fetters, vacillating between equally fruitless longings for mutually exclusive ideals (p. 191, p. 184). K. rejects such a fate as unacceptable, and he openly disdains those, like Block, who appear content merely to subsist in limbo. But he rejects Block's fate in words only, without committing himself to a definitive choice between entrance into the Law, at any cost, or the pursuit of a life "completely outside the jurisdiction of the court" (p. 266, p. 254).

In effect, K. is unable or unwilling to reject either of the two desires that dominate his conscious and unconscious life. Instead, he deludes himself into believing that his two ideals can be pursued simultaneously by means of a single strategy, and that by keeping his "intelligence calm and analytical to the end," he may finally overcome the obstacles barring his way to justice (p. 292, p. 269). Faced with the responsibility to decide his own fate, K. elects not to decide at all. He neither completes the phone call that would summon his friend Hasterer, the *Staatsanwalt*, nor does he mobilize a defense that would banish the court from his besieged consciousness. Rather, he fosters a delusion that apparently reduces the "horrible double life" into a struggle against hostile authority.

[1] Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, rev. E. M. Butler (New York: Vintage, 1969), p. 17; *Der Prozess* (Berlin: Schocken, 1935), p. 22. Subsequent references appear in parentheses within the text, the first page number corresponding to the English version, the second to the German. Longer quotations from *The Trial* appear in both languages, though in the interest of clarity the original German text has been placed in the endnotes.

[2] "Welchen Sinn es hätte, an einen Staatsanwalt zu telephonieren, wenn ich angeblich verhaftet bin? Gut, ich werde nicht telephonieren," "Aber doch," sagte der Aufseher . . . "bitte, telephonieren Sie doch." "Nein, ich will nicht mehr," sagte K., und ging zum Fenster. (pp. 22–23)

[3] In her revision of the Muir translation, E. M. Butler renders *Staatsanwalt*

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as "lawyer," which would not seem to represent an improvement over the Muirs' "advocate." In her work on the unfinished chapters, however, Butler replaces "lawyer" with the more accurate "prosecuting counsel."

[4] Wilhelm Emrich, *Franz Kafka: A Critical Study of His Writings*, trans. Sheema Zeben Buehne (New York: Ungar, 1968).

[5] Trotz der Menschenkenntnis und Welterfahrung, welche K. während seiner langen Dienstzeit in der Bank erworben hatte, war ihm doch die Gesellschaft seines Stammtisches immer als außerordentlich achtungswürdig erschienen, und er leugnete sich selbst gegenüber niemals, daß es für ihn eine große Ehre war, einer solchen Gesellschaft anzugehören. (p. 282)

[6] K. unterlag dem Direktor in diesen Augenblicken. . . . er gerade K.s Stellung vergessen zu haben und sprach mit ihm wie mit einem Kind oder wie mit einem unwissenden jungen Menschen. . . . (p. 288)

[7] Walter Sokel, "The Programme of K.'s Court: Oedipal and Existential Meanings of *The Trial*," in *On Kafka*, ed. F. Kuna (London: Elek, 1976), p. 6. While my point here owes a great deal to Professor Sokel's article, I should mention that he has objected to my analysis: "I cannot agree with your differentiating 'The Judgment' and *The Trial* in this way. In this context I should rather emphasize the parallelism. But Georg and Josef K. are equally split along the lines of conscious assertion of autonomy and repression of unconscious wishes to surrender to an existence that would not bring them in conflict with an Oedipal authority. In Georg, too, the focal point of conflict is in his own mind, just as much as it is in Josef K.'s case."

[8] Herman Uyttersprot, "Zur Struktur von Kafkas 'Der Prozess.' Versuch einer Neuordnung," *Revue de Langues Vivantes*, 42 (1953), 333. Brod believed that the fragment was intended to follow the "Lawyer" section of the novel, apparently because Kafka began composing the text of "Prosecuting Counsel" toward the end of the sheet of paper that contains the final sentences of that chapter. However, Uyttersprot has argued convincingly that, based on internal evidence, the fragment must have been intended as a prologue or opening chapter to the novel.

[9] Walter Sokel, *Franz Kafka* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1966), p. 31.

[10] Franz Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1946), p. 99.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

[12] Franz Kafka, *I Am a Memory Come Alive: Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1974), p. 26.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

[15] Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes*, p. 97.

[16] Kafka, *I Am a Memory Come Alive*, p. 25.

[17] Er hatte es verstanden, sich in der Bank in verhältnismäßig kurzer Zeit zu seiner hohen Stellung emporzuarbeiten und sich, von allen anerkannt, in dieser Stellung zu erhalten, er mußte jetzt nur diese Fähigkeiten, die ihm das ermöglicht hatten, ein wenig dem Prozeß zuwenden, und es war kein Zweifel, daß es gut ausgehen müßt. (p. 152)

[18] Ingeborg Henel, "Die Türhüterlegende und ihre Bedeutung für Kafkas 'Prozess,'" *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 37 (1963), 50–70.

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Revolution and Isolation in *La Condition humaine*

James L. Kastely

In *La Condition humaine*, few, if any, relationships involve serious commitment or intimacy. This absence might be expected in a world that denies people dignity, for part of the way that alienation would manifest itself would be in the breakdown of relationships. But the novel does not postulate social conditions as a cause; rather, Malraux's concept of the self as private makes it impossible for his characters to break free of their isolation and acknowledge another character in a way that would give communal existence a point. As Kyo explains to Tchen, self-awareness is the source of human anguish: "My father believes . . . that the essence of man is anguish, the consciousness of his own fatality, from which all fears are born, even the fear of death."[1]

Politics is irrelevant to this internally generated anxiety, and the revolutionary actions within the novel function instead as intoxications intended to dull momentarily the pain of isolation. The need for action paradoxically leads an intoxicated character to seek isolation and to view human relationships as unfortunate encumbrances that work against the goal of a pure act of self-negation. Because obligations to another person entangle a private self in concerns that are not exclusively under that self's will, a character who wishes to reduce through action his or her personal suffering must be freed from any intimate commitments.[2] This devaluing of others raises the question of whether these characters can escape their private alienation and achieve the public character necessary for a true community and a genuine revolution.

Kyo, one of the novel's most politically enlightened characters, provides the clearest account of the individual's fundamental solitude. His image of a primitive night underlying and obscured by the city's

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surface night suggests that the original and primitive self is similarly masked and ultimately inaccessible. Such a self is fated to be inherently and inescapably private. The obvious consequence of this mode of the self's existence is that no Other can ever acquire genuine access to it. This is made clear by Kyo's concern with how we hear our voice. Malraux uses Kyo's astonishment at not recognizing his own voice on the phonograph record to characterize the problem of voice as the internal self made external. The fact that we hear our own voice with our throats while others hear it with their ears means that there are two distinct origins of knowledge about the self that cannot be reconciled. How we come to know ourselves is different in kind from how we come to know others. This fundamental separation of self-knowledge from knowledge of an Other is, of course, one source of the problem of skepticism with respect to other minds.[3]

Further, the example of the phonograph records suggests that self-knowledge is peculiarly internal and based on private sensation. Because a character experiences his true self as a certain intense quality, then his most complete state of being is that of highest intensity. But since life cannot remain at a high level of intensity, it is the fate of the character to feel incomplete or inauthentic. This feeling coupled with the feeling of irremediable isolation defines the fundamental suffering of the human condition. Intoxication provides an activity that occupies the character, making him and his activity fully one. Tchen discovers his ultimate self-possession only when he decides to undertake the suicidal assassination attempt on Chiang Kai-shek. He cannot hear Suen's argument that such an attempt is not the best political strategy because Tchen's only concern is to consume himself in an action that completely takes him over and leaves him no opportunity to become aware of himself as distinct from the action. What Tchen seeks is death. He is searching for that moment that ends time and whose fullness will not be followed by a return to an incomplete and mundane reality.

In the perverse logic of an intoxication fed by a need for activity, death is fulfillment. This logic seems to gut action of a purpose by condemning all action to self-contradiction, and such would surely be the case if the purpose of this action were political. But as Tchen's failed assassination of Chiang shows, the political consequences are subordinate to the experiential need for a feeling of complete self-possession. What this action finally seeks is to transcend a human condition that is defined and limited by temporality and solitude.

But if Tchen's case makes clear that an overt revolutionary action can mask a deeper private motive, Hemmelrich's suggests that the novel

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equivocates about the conflict between a character's private need for action and his role as a revolutionary. Immobilized by his divided loyalties to family and revolution, Hemmelrich lacerated himself with guilt and raged at his impotence. Action always remained a proffered salvation he could not choose which mocked his incapacity to mitigate the suffering of his wife and child. To be able to act on behalf of his family, Hemmelrich needed paradoxically to be liberated from them. Their destruction rendered his moral conflict moot and allowed him to give himself fully to the demands of the revolution. As Katow had predicted, death freed Hemmelrich.

His spiritual rebirth as a political actor is appropriately symbolized by a "halo of indifference," for in his now uncompromised allegiance to the revolution, there remains nothing to stand in the way of his complete dedication to action. His family's death has transformed his personal alienation into a political commitment. What might have been a devastating loss became a piece of good fortune. Hemmelrich is relieved by their death: "In spite of the catastrophe, of the sensation of having the ground give way under his feet, leaving him nothing but empty space, he could not banish from his mind the atrocious, weighty, profound joy of liberation" (p. 253). In a novel in which all other characters encounter intense disappointment, Hemmelrich stands out as someone who escapes his fate. He manages to survive the attack on the communist post and is the only revolutionary to avoid capture when the post is finally taken. Later in a letter to May, Pei approvingly quotes Hemmelrich, who has fled to the Soviet Union, as an example of a worker completely engaged in and fulfilled by the revolution: "Before, I began to live when I left the factory; now, I begin to live when I enter it. It's the first time in my life that I work and know why I work, not merely waiting patiently to die" (p. 330). His survival and continued dedication to the revolution seem to provide evidence that the revolution, however severely damaged, is still going forth. Hemmelrich, the worker, is part of the revolution's legacy that may provide a better future for the oppressed.

Critics have read Hemmelrich's transformation variously. Lucien Goldmann sees this new Hemmelrich as a paradigm of political commitment,[4] but W. M. Frohock expresses the more widely felt sense of unease at Hemmelrich's political ascension by calling his escape an "unexplained irony."[5] There is good reason to feel uneasy about Hemmelrich. In a telling passage, his liberation is described as an intoxication:

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> Again he became aware of his shoe-soles, stuck to the floor, and tottered: muscles were not aided by thought. But an intense exaltation was overwhelming him, the most powerful that he had ever known; he abandoned himself to this frightful intoxication with entire consent. (p. 254)

Frohock's admission that Hemmelrich's escape is an "unexplained irony" shows an unwillingness to pursue fully his insight into this apparent discrepancy in the novel. Hemmelrich is a troubling character because the novel appears to put him forward as a model revolutionary, yet, by its own logic, the novel must consider him to be politically suspect. Indeed, in his obsession with vengeance, Hemmelrich resembles most closely Konig, the reprehensible chief of the secret police who butchers the communists.[6] Both characters are obsessed by the idea of killing the enemy, and this intoxication is the root of their political participation. As Konig makes clear, politics is merely a cover for a personal vendetta. What counts is the possibility of acting on one's desire for vengeance and not the political cause, which is only incidentally pursued.

Finally, Hemmelrich's full allegiance to the struggle of the workers and peasants does not address the sources of his family's suffering, for these extend beyond the political and economic conditions that have unquestionably contributed to their misery. His child suffered from a birth defect that was not a consequence of political and economic conditions but of a capricious and indifferent fate. No action by Hemmelrich could undo this fate or alleviate the pain. His imposed impotence was as responsible for Hemmelrich's sense of victimization as were the humiliations that he experiences. What he longs for throughout the novel is a simpler world in which problems can be effectively dealt with through action. Even more than by his desire to effect political change, Hemmelrich is obsessed by a need to act as a mode of private relief.

The paradox that Hemmelrich embodies of being a character both trapped by his own internal compulsion and freed to become a revolutionary actor points to the larger problem in the novel. His elation at being freed from the responsibility for and commitment to particular individuals suggests that the novel sees relationships primarily as constraints on a private self.[7]

The novel's apparent alternative to the ethos of self-consumption is a life involving a self with another. Such an understanding of human possibilities would see the life instincts as competing with the death instincts and would argue for the role of Eros in human life.[8] David

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Bevan has claimed that eroticism is "possibly *the* theme which reverberates most widely throughout the novel."[9] But in the universe of *La Condition humaine*, Eros is not a desire to complete the self by finding one's Other; rather, it is a drive to dominate another and to impose a will on a world or self.[10] When characters seek others, it is not to enter into a meaningful relationship but to assert their selves at the expense of the Other. The frustrated will to power is displaced into sexual aggression. What is sought is the possibility for complete and unlimited expression, and this requires a character to deny the legitimacy of any claims made by the Other.

This need for action and the consequent terror of attachment to another human being pervades the novel, manifesting itself most frequently as a contempt or mistrust for women. Ferral, the head of the French Consortium, is the paradigmatic erotic character. As the insurrection appears to be victorious and Ferral is forced to feel the limits of his ability to act, he returns home to his lover, Valerie, over whom he intends to assert his mastery and thereby recover his image of himself as a figure of power. For Ferral, women are an alien and despicable form of life that is necessary if he is to feel valuable.[11] Although he hates women, they are essential to his continual need to reassure himself that he has power. Valerie offers a particular challenge, for she is a person of equal will and intelligence, and their relationship has become a high-stakes game in which a vicious struggle for self-possession underlies the adroit gamesmanship.[12] Ferral can only continue to maintain his self-esteem if he is able to make Valerie feel that he owns her. She threatens Ferral's categories, essential to his sense of himself, of man as the one who is to conquer and woman as the one who is to submit.

In this highly charged relationship, sex, by introducing the possibility for a loss of self-control, becomes the battleground for self-esteem. In a competitive sexuality, an orgasm represents a moment of vulnerability in which a self temporarily throws off its protective masks and exists simply as is. This makes it a particularly potent weapon to use against another character. As the rhythms of the orgasm grip the body, they can overwhelm the conscious determination of the mind, as the private self is publicly expressed through its passions. These passions also can temporarily negate the will as the source of determination for action. In the game of domination, the orgasm is the moment at which to claim possession of the Other:

> He [Ferral] joined her in bed. Caresses gave Valerie a sealed expression which he was eager to see transformed. He

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> summoned her other expression with too much passion not to hope that the pleasure of the senses would imprint it upon Valerie's face. He believed that he was thus destroying a mask, and that what was deepest, most secret, in her was necessarily what he preferred. (p. 118)

Ferral needs to feel that he has come to know Valerie's inner self because once he has fathomed that, then he can despise and dismiss her as a human being. In the battle for supremacy in the relationship, knowledge is power, and power is what Ferral, in his perpetual quest for invulnerability, seeks.

Ferral's fear and hatred of Valerie is finally a fear and hatred of the body, for the body both limits a person and makes him or her vulnerable. The body cannot be trusted; it is the antithesis of mind and will. Ferral regards sex as a zero-sum game in which he can recover his image of himself as a creature of will and intelligence only if he can reduce Valerie to being a thing that lacks an interiority similar to his own. This is to treat another self primarily as an epistemological rather than as an ethical problem. One seeks to know another self for purposes of strategic advantage. If Ferral can see Valerie as a creature who is solely body, he can deny that she is human. Precisely, for this reason, Ferral insists on having the light on, so he can witness Valerie's orgasm and desecrate her privacy. Once having seen her, he can then dismiss her.

In the novel's sexual Manichaeism, the body is female and it is to be controlled; the will is male and its purpose is to control, to possess and exercise power. For Ferral, one exists only as a will, and sex is itself an exercise of the will. It is in a sexual experience that a character can be most aware of one's isolation, uniqueness, and power because one can transform another into mere body. Sex becomes the guarantee and preserver of isolation; it is the act in which the solitary actor as will is glorified in his self-sufficiency. As Ferral watches the sleeping Valerie, he can feel that only he authentically exists: "She did not trail with her in her sleep memories and hopes which he would not possess: she was nothing but the other pole of his own pleasure. Never had she lived: never has she been a little girl" (p. 119). Ferral feels the onanistic triumph, as he voyeuristically derives pleasure not from somatic experience but from inhabiting a fantasy world in which there is only a single self and all else exists to gratify it. This is a world that logically excludes relationships, for it only permits things (instrumentalities) and not people. It is the fantasy of a deified human will in complete possession of itself.

But if Ferral gives an unmitigated expression to the novel's

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understanding sex as power, he is only a heightened example of this pervasive misogyny.[13] Politically disparate characters acquire a common identity in their contempt for women and fear of the body. Ferral's misogyny is certainly matched by Tchen, who invariably uses derogatory gender metaphors to convey his disgust of weakness. It is not clear whether for Tchen it is worse to be a foreign exploiter or a woman. His contempt and fear of women defines his relationships with them, which have been almost exclusively confined to prostitutes. His sexuality, as something arising internally yet existing beyond his control, baffles and threatens him—his need to masturbate is the only thing that has proven stronger than his will. Because women are an occasion of sexual arousal, they are a reminder of his incompleteness and vulnerability. The body's instinctive yearning for contact with another body provides powerful experiential evidence for the inadequacy of the solitary and enclosed individual that the self as will must deny. Eros as the fundamental drive to make contact with the Other challenges Tchen's deeply needed myth of a private self that is complete and invulnerable. The unasked for and unwanted stirrings and promptings of the body are evidence for Tchen of the fundamental human weakness.

After Tchen has assassinated the arms dealer and is in the presence of the other insurrectionists, he compares his understanding of their humanity, which he sees as a soiling for a creature of the will, to his understanding of his sister's sexuality. Women are to be feared because they remind men that they are human and that they are not pure wills. The novel's misogyny arises because of the needs of the male characters to deny a humanity that requires the existence of another self for completion. Eros which entails that people have/are bodies challenges the myth of the private self. It is as if the novel's characters are reacting to Wittgenstein's insight that the human body is the best image that we have of the soul and live in terror of exposing their souls, thus making themselves vulnerable to other wills.

Such characters cannot enter relationships, nor can their desperate attempts at self-possession succeed. Ferral's triumph over Valerie is temporary. He has not succeeded in transforming her into an instrumentality. Valerie denies Ferral's triumph over her while acknowledging that she is, in part, her body. It is not only that she revenges herself on Ferral by publicly humiliating him, but, more importantly, she attacks his understanding of gender. He has never possessed her, for he has not managed to reduce her to being merely a body that exists for his pleasure. In her letter to Ferral, Valerie argues

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for a complex understanding of a person in which the body has an irreducible role:

> I refuse to be regarded as a body, just as you refuse to be regarded as a check-book. You act with me as the prostitutes do with you: "Talk, but pay. . . ." I am *also* that body which you want me to be *wholly*, I know it. It is not always easy for me to protect myself from the idea that people have of me. Your presence brings me close to my body with disgust, as springtime brings me close to it with joy. (p. 216)

Valerie's refusal and humiliation of Ferral challenge his fantasy of the submissive woman. More than anything else, Valerie's revenge on Ferral is a claim for her own personhood. As he reviews Valerie's letter just before he picks up a courtesan, Ferral is haunted by the phrase that a woman is a human being:

> What dead-drunk psychologist had had the idea of giving the name of love to the feeling which now poisoned his life? Love is an exalted obsession; his women obsessed him, yes—like a desire of vengeance. He went to women to be judged, he who countenanced no judgment. The woman who would have admired him in the giving of herself, whom he would not have had to fight, would not have existed in his eyes. Condemned to coquettes or to whores. There were their bodies. Fortunately. Otherwise. . . . "You will die, dear, without having suspected that a woman is a human being. . . ." To her, perhaps; not to him. A woman, a human being! She is relaxation, a voyage, an enemy. . . . (pp. 229–30)

Valerie's assertion of herself as a person is her ultimate frustration of Ferral, and the only way that he can respond to it is to find another female body on which to revenge himself. Ferral is driven to humiliate the courtesan to prove that Valerie is wrong. Malraux comments upon Ferral's dehumanization of Eros and his desperate attempt to reassert his self by treating the courtesan as if she were a simple prostitute by placing over Ferral's bed the Tibetan painting in which two skeletons embrace in a trance. If the only person that Ferral has ever gone to bed with is himself, then the painting underlines the sterility of that self-encounter.

Some critics have seen the Kyo/May relationship as Malraux's positive alternative to the perverse eroticism of Ferral.[14] Lucien Goldmann has gone so far as to call the Kyo/May relationship "one of the most beautiful, purest love stories in major twentieth-century fiction."[15] Kyo and May do appear to be the antithesis of Ferral and Valerie. Where Ferral and Valerie's relationship was a combat of wills,

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that of Kyo and May is defined in terms of freedom. Kyo is the one male character who is aware of the "fundamental misogyny of almost all men" (p. 49). He has set himself in opposition to those like Ferral who need to humiliate others as a way of achieving self-possession. Even as he and May quarrel, Kyo recognizes the specialness of his relationship to May: " 'To others, I am what I have done.' To May alone, he was not what he had done; to him alone, she was altogether different from her biography" (p. 53). It is only to May that Kyo has a special connection—one that, even if imperfect, is a source of genuine comfort.

It is tempting to make much of this relationship, to see it as the embodiment of a new kind of meeting between men and women and as a promise for a new social order within and following the revolution. But such a reading can only be sustained by ignoring some of its troubling aspects. First, Malraux has chosen to introduce the couple in a quarrel. They are both tired and on edge, and, as Susan Rubin Suleiman has noted, their relationship has been disintegrating for some time: "What is more important in our context, however, is his discovery, after her 'confession,' that May had begun to recede from him way before—that it was not her infidelity, but time and habit, that would eventually separate her from him."[16] This quarrel is not an aberration within their relationship but rather represents their ongoing difficulties and partial estrangement.

If one looks at how Malraux uses the relationship within the structure of the novel, even more questions are raised. Just before his conversation with May, Kyo is obsessed with the unfamiliarity of his voice on the record. This train of thought raises the problem of skepticism with respect to other minds. As he enters the conversation with May, he is troubled by a fresh recognition of his separateness from others. His quarrel with May serves to confirm the fact of separation, as Kyo becomes more aware of how distant he really is from May.

The conversation is structured to raise questions about the gap between Kyo's ideas, some of which are the consequence of a theoretical understanding of human relationships, and the reality of his own emotions. For all his sympathy and concern with practical affairs, Kyo sounds quite doctrinaire when he discusses suffering, assigning it a value only if it can be shown to have an instrumental worth. May has a richer understanding of suffering and relates it to childbirth as an integral fact of life. May sees their disagreement over the value of suffering separating along lines of gender. Kyo articulates a male perspective that makes all value a function of a thing's utility for the revolution. May claims that she represents a female understanding,

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which accepts a world that contains as a part of itself an ineradicable pain. She accepts life more openly than Kyo. She can go to bed with the dying Langley as a gesture of human compassion and be surprised that Kyo makes so much of it. Kyo refuses to see it in human terms and responds with a hollow and somewhat spiteful protest that he has given May her freedom. His jealousy and anger are fed by his feelings of racial inferiority. Later, Gisors will suggest that Kyo's political commitment in fact has its roots in his personal difficulties with race and gender: "A half-breed, an outcast, despised by the white men and even more by the white women, Kyo had not tried to win them: he had sought and had found his own kind" (p. 64). It is perhaps Kyo's sense of inferiority that causes him to see himself as an object of May's pity, and this, by raising his feeling of vulnerability, sickens him.

The scene, intended to point up the obvious discrepancy between Kyo's theoretical conclusions and his actual emotions, also helps define the Kyo/May relationship as one in which political ideas have played a major role. The novel is ambiguous as to whether the discrepancy between the theory and the practice is intended as a critique of the theory or a demonstration of Kyo's complexity or both. But the scene does show that the Kyo/May relationship is mediated partly through an ideology of dignity, and the scene suggests at least a qualified view of a theory that is so easily challenged by life. Further, it raises questions about Kyo's ability to maintain a personal relationship. Is his act of giving May her freedom (which in the very act of giving suggests that her freedom is not inherently something she possesses but is rather a consequence of Kyo's enlightened largesse) really an act of love or is it a theoretical dodge to avoid serious commitment? Is this freedom merely a way of remaining unentangled? When Kyo bitterly acknowledges that May is free, he takes this to mean that they are obligated in no way to each other, so in theory May does not have to explain herself to Kyo. Kyo's freedom, in effect, denies the worth of a particular attachment, and is simply another guise of the private self's need for invulnerability. If Kyo is to be praised as a character who has understood the misogyny of almost all men, then it must be said that he has not escaped from it and that his political efforts harmonize quite well with the demands of an invulnerable self.

This need for invulnerability, at times, is masked by Malraux's attempt to establish a new and nonerotic basis for the relationship. James W. Greenlee shares Goldmann's view that the Kyo/May relationship is a model of revolutionary community:

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> Kyo, however, has risen above this individualistic urge. Even though his love remains quite possessive, it permits him to respect his wife as a person with an inherent human dignity. She is not a sexual conquest. But this has one rather curious effect: it changes their marriage from a conjugal to a fraternal union. Their love is based on a shared revolutionary activism. The bonds that join Kyo and May also unite him to the revolutionaries of Shanghai.[17]

If Greenlee is right, then Malraux has provided an alternative to a relationship of domination by eliminating Eros as a basis for relationship. The genuine revolutionary relationship will be one mediated by ideological convictions. There will be no difference between men/women relationships and those between men/men for all will be modeled on a fraternal unity. So the problem of Eros is solved by eliminating women as a distinct gender. Malraux's descriptions that May had something "virile in her gate" (p. 43) and that "her very broad forehead, also, had something masculine about it" (p. 44), give some evidence that May's suitability as a partner in the model revolutionary relationship is due precisely to her being a woman who resembles a man.[18] This has led Denis Boak to suggest that at times the authenticity of the relationship becomes questionable and its ideological underpinning surfaces: "like all Malraux's imaginative attempts, it [the relationship] is intellectually conceived, and at times perhaps it is implausibly cerebral."[19]

But the considerable power that the relationship does contain is in large part a consequence of the sexual and emotional energy that would have been absent had the relationship been one of fraternal love. That the relationship cannot suppress the erotic elements leads it into the problems of the invulnerable self and the denial of the need for the Other. The suppression of Eros also manifests itself in Kyo's reflections on May, which begin to parallel Ferral's thoughts on Valerie. In the throes of estrangement Kyo begins to conceive of May as a body, as something that is female:

> He opened his eyes; this familiar athletic body, with its averted profile: an elongated eye, starting at the temple, sunk between the exposed forehead and the cheek-bone—a human being. . . . Who was she? A woman who had just had intercourse with a man? But was she not also the one who tolerated his weaknesses, his afflictions, his outbursts of irritation, the one who helped him nurse his wounded comrades, watched over his dead friends? . . . The sweetness of her voice, which lingered in the air. . . . One does not forget what one wishes. And now this body was being

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> invested with the poignant mystery of a familiar person suddenly transformed—the mystery one feels before a mute, blind or mad being. And she was a woman, Not a kind of man. Something else. . . . (pp. 49–50)

It is almost as if up to this moment Kyo had been unaware of May's gender. He, of course, has always known that she is a woman, but he is only now beginning to realize his sense of the feminine as something fundamentally different from the masculine. His crisis appears to him to be a problem of knowledge: he does not really know May. This insight again raises the problem of skepticism with respect to other minds, for it assumes that if one can know the Other with certainty, then he will be able to deal with that person.[20] This strategy conforms well to Kyo's normal mode of operation, which does not seek to know the person in his or her individuality but only wishes to know how that person can be used.[21] But aware that he is losing his sense of May, Kyo breaks off his thought. He instinctively realizes that he cannot solve the problem of the separateness of the Other by making it an epistemological problem. In his fear of losing May, Kyo begins to approach a more adequate way to deal with another. He wants to hold May and to seek "refuge" in the coming together of their bodies, in a physical embrace that would be a mutual acknowledgment of their need for each other. They are, however, interrupted, and the moment is lost and will not be recovered. Their next crisis will be resolved along more ideological lines.

As an alternative to the perverse erotic relationships or the ideologically determined and hence unstable conjugal relationships, the novel explores briefly a relationship based on an intimate identification with another. In a scene just prior to the suppression of the insurrectionists, Gisors' brother-in-law, Kama, appears briefly and discusses his art. This scene is not needed to advance the action of the plot; rather, it develops the theme of suffering and privateness. The scene is initially constructed around a misunderstanding between Occident and Orient. Clappique had asked Kama why he painted, and Kama answered that he painted for his wife. Clappique, puzzled by the answer, thought that Kama might have misunderstood the question, so asked it again. Kama answers the question a second time with an explanation that an Eastern artist understands art differently than a Western one. For Kama, art is inherently linked to a person's love of another. Kama has recently returned from Europe and has been struck by the self-involvement of Western art: " 'When I went to Europe, I saw the museums. The more your painters paint apples, and even lines

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which do not represent objects, the more they talk about themselves. For me it is the world that counts'" (pp. 186–87).

The world that he speaks of is primarily comprised of his wife and daughter. He analogizes his method of painting to the Western concept of charity as a way of seeing life that makes the world a place in which selves are bound to other selves. Art is a mode of vision in which the self is not private but linked essentially to the Other and with the world. While the rest of the novel's characters are separated from others and the world, Kama sees the empirical world as but a symbol for an essential world. His vision allows him to be free from the suffering that grips the other characters in the novel. He is not trapped in his private self but is defined, rather, by his relationships to other people. His art is an alternative to intoxication.

As an analogue to the Western concept of charity, Kama's art establishes a community based not on the immediacy of erotic attachment but on the mediation of a vision of the fundamental underlying unity of the world. But Kama's notion of art is not available to the other characters, and his appearance in the novel seems to have no consequence for any character.[22] Gisors and Clappique, the two characters who actually hear his words, are momentarily made uneasy, but are not ultimately bothered by what Kama says. At the end of the novel, Gisors will live with Kama and take some comfort from his music, but he will not come any closer to embracing Kama's ideas.

Part of the reason that Kama's understanding may not have much impact on the other characters is that it provides an alternative to the human condition that is too spiritual and does not offer a way to move from understanding the self as alienated and private to understanding it as inherently involved with others. The political reality of the world is too immediate and pressing to allow the characters to rest comfortably with an understanding that the present alienation is merely a surface reality and that the relationship of the empirical world to the real world is that of symbol to referent. Such a vision of the empirical world must be based on a faith in the existence of the nonvisible world, and the political reality that the characters experience daily precludes such faith. Hence, Kama's understanding is not adequate to the felt political reality and provides no bridge or commonality between itself and the understanding of the other characters. They are closed off from his notion of art as an alternative to their lives of suffering.

The serious revolutionary relationship will be another kind of a spiritual bonding, one that is tied to political reality, and it will not be between man and woman, but between man and man. So that there is

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no mistake about this, Malraux emphasizes the maleness of the relationship by calling it not simply a fraternity but a virile love.[23] The community of revolutionary martyrs will create the possibility of a set of human relationships which do not currently exist. In the extremity of their situation of having to face the human condition at its starkest, the condemned revolutionaries will defiantly assert the value of a human dignity against an inhuman force bent on the humiliation and destruction of the human. The novel's events have led inexorably to the hideous executions of the revolutionaries in the steam engine's boiler. The initial insurrection led only to a subsequent suppression. The unstable alliance between Chiang Kai-shek and the communists became unnecessary for Chiang once the insurrection had succeeded. And, however inflexibly doctrinaire in their Stalinistic interpretation of revolution as fatality, the party chiefs in Hankow were right that a Trotskyite revolution based on the peasants had no chance of succeeding. There were no immediate political options; rather, there was an inescapable inevitability to the events.

Malraux's rewriting of historical circumstances provides further proof that he wanted to focus on the forces in defeat. Whether Malraux actually based Kyo on Chou En-lai, Chou, Kyo's historical counterpart in the Shanghai insurrection, escaped capture, while Kyo is caught before he can resist.[24] This revision of Chou's fate shows that the novel's political interest is not whether a revolution is possible; rather, the novel is occupied with a more preliminary question: can people break free from their isolation and reconceive themselves, not as individuals who seek to mitigate private anguish but as members of a community who can act from a sense of human dignity? Metaphysical, political, and economic conditions have come together heteronomously to enforce a solitude that vitiates the possibility of action. The revolutionaries' task is to resist their fate and to transform a situation of humiliation into a situation of dignity. The courage of Kyo and Katow in the face of death is the novel's answer to whether such transformation is possible.

Before Kyo is brought to the station to be executed, he is temporarily held in a prison where his dignity is directly challenged. Prison, even more than his impending death, attacks all that Kyo believes:

> So true to legend, the warder's vileness did not seem to him [Kyo] altogether real; and, at the same time, it seemed to him a foul fatality, as if power were enough to change almost every man into a beast. Those obscure beings who stirred behind the bars, disturbing like the colossal insects and crustaceans in his

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> childhood dreams, were no more human. Complete solitude and humiliation. (p. 281)

In prison, Kyo confronts a primitive ignominy that denies the significance of the human: a feeble-minded and elderly man is beaten by a sadistic warden as the prisoners cheer the warden on. Kyo, alone, opposes the warden, and through his intercession the beatings are stopped. His brief stay in prison is his trial in the face of isolation, and his later resistance to Konig's attempt to make him betray his belief in dignity in order to save his own life is anticlimactic.

Kyo's actions in prison seem to suggest that he has resisted the appeal of the inhuman, but his resistance is more complicated and equivocal. He acknowledges early in the scene that it is only the possession of cyanide that permits him to resist prison, and "had he not been master of his death, terror would have gotten the better of him in this place" (p. 281). Further, Kyo is able to intercede on behalf of the feeble-minded prisoner and to escape serious repercussions only because of his money and social position. These facts do not impugn Kyo's genuine courage, but they do suggest that his resistance to humiliation does not represent the assertion of the human against a total situation that would deny it. Rather, they argue that Kyo's resistance is possible only because of certain external support, the most important of which is his having control over his own suffering and death. This control offers him the reassurance that his fate is not exclusively in the hands of his tormentors, but rather it remains with him. So Kyo's time in prison does not provide the full test for the discovery of human dignity.

Equally, his suicide does not serve this purpose. Despite Kyo's sense of comradeship with the other communists awaiting execution, Kyo's possession of cyanide separates him as a distinctly privileged character. Unlike the majority of his comrades, he does have control over his fate. The cyanide allows him to retain an invulnerability that he can glorify in seeing his death as a victory of action over passivity. His death becomes a triumph not of his personhood but of his manhood.[25]

In this euphoric moment of celebrating his death as a victory, Kyo develops his spiritual vision of a new type of human relationship. As he approaches his death, Kyo discovers the possibility of a virile affection:

> wherever men labor in pain, in absurdity, in humiliation, they were thinking of doomed men like these, as believers pray; and, in the city, they were beginning to love these dying men as though they were already dead. . . . In all of the earth that this

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> last night covered over, this place of agony was most weighted with virile love. (p. 303)

But this concept of virile affection is not really a radical departure from relationships of the past. It is haunted by the same problem: what makes these men lovable is that they are going to die. They are loved in the abstract as martyrs that can be believed in. They become lovable because they are about to lose their bodies. The revolutionary relationship is not an erotic bonding of human beings but rather a spiritual communion with absent selves that is made possible by death and does not grow out of the needs and urges of life. Kyo's celebration of these revolutionaries is a celebration of death:

> A death saturated with the brotherly quavering, an assembly of the vanquished in which the multitudes would recognize their martyrs, a bloody legend of which the golden legends are made! How, already facing death, could he fail to hear this murmur of human sacrifice crying to him that the virile heart of men is for the dead as good a refuge as the mind? (p. 304)

These men are lovable because they have been transformed into characters within a narrative. This, however, is what Tchen sought for himself. It is the ideal form of relationship for a character who is defined by his incapacity to enter into community with others. One does not love the person but rather one believes in the person as he is transformed into a character in a legend.

This exalted, inflated, and melodramatic understanding of virile fraternity contrasts with the quiet dignity that Katow exhibits in death. Malraux may well have felt the inadequacy of Kyo's death as a response to Pascal's analysis of the human condition, for he added the scene of Katow's death after he had completed the first draft.[26]

The solitude has intensified; Katow is, to use his favorite word, absolutely alone: "Katov, since the death of Kyo—who had panted for at least a minute—felt himself thrown back into a solitude all the stronger and more painful as he was surrounded by his own people" (p. 305). There is no romantic sense of virile fraternity; rather, Katow's awareness of his fellow comrades condemned to death increases his sense of desertion. Where Kyo could find suffering as a bond on which to build, Katow refuses to glorify the impending deaths. Instead, he brings a stoic resolve, as if he were finally confronted with that unmitigated suffering that had been constantly threatening his life.

Katow's situation, however, initially parallels Kyo's, for he too has a cyanide capsule and hence has some control over his death. But unlike Kyo, Katow relinquishes his control over his fate when he gives his

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cyanide to two wounded comrades. His death heroically challenges the human condition, and critics have appropriately applauded the power of this scene in which defeat is apparently transformed into a victory.[27]

But even this heroic scene is problematic. First, the heroism of his generosity is partly undermined by the structure of the scene. Katow makes the supreme sacrifice of giving his cyanide to his two companions only to have one of them drop the halves of the capsule. The momentary loss of the capsules deflates the heroism and emphasizes the absurdity of action: the most generous action of the novel is almost wasted. Farce has intruded into tragedy and has brought into question not Katow's motives, which are truly heroic, but the possibility of a heroic action in an absurd universe. The human is reasserted with the ironic fall of the heroic.[28] The words of Gisors that the human aspiration is to escape the human condition echo in this scene. The scene's irony is to prevent the reader from deifying Katow.

And it is not the irony alone that raises problems for the scene. Katow himself is troubling. He is the least developed of the characters. Geoffrey Hartman has argued that Katow's character was intentionally kept as an unknown in order that it could be used as a device to allow other characters to define themselves.[29] But even if that is Malraux's intent, it is troubling that the major action of the novel falls to one of the least developed characters. Further, what is known about Katow's past life works against his action having a full political force. Katow had earlier told Hemmelrich that the death of his family would free Hemmelrich to act. Katow could say this because he had been freed by the death of his wife. This paralleling of the two characters suggests that part of the reason that Katow can act stoically is because he is not involved in a personal relationship. David Wilkinson sees Katow as a character who "has already been freed of the burden of anguish" (p. 65). But as Wilkinson acknowledges, this burden is the suffering of others. Katow is aware of this freedom and "discovers in himself a lusterless joy: no wife, no children" (p. 301). To call this a freeing is to accept a view of the self that values invulnerability. These selves do not value community, and their equivocal status is marked by the oxymoronic quality of "lusterless joy." Katow is free to the extent that he has been emptied of human content. It is possible that he remains an elusive character precisely because he has been emptied almost to the point of abstraction.[30]

Finally the political significance of his action is problematic because of his motives. As Elizabeth Tenenbaum has noted: "Katov's heroism does not result from a sense of oneness with his comrades, but from a

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determination to transcend his fear and isolation."[31] And earlier Gisors had included Katow and his dedication to the revolution on the list of intoxicated characters: "Under his [Gisors] words flowed an obscure and hidden counter-current of figures: Ch'en and murder, Clappique and his madness, Katov and Revolution, May and love, himself and opium" (p. 227). Rather than being an act of pure selflessness, Katow's death is a triumph for the invulnerable self. If he is a martyr, it is because he wears the same "halo of indifference" that Hemmelrich acquires when his family is slaughtered. This is a fully spiritual condition from which human concerns have been eliminated. So if Katow is the novel's triumphant hero, then this is a novel that celebrates the self that has transcended normal human relationships.

The novel, however, does not end with Katow's heroic gesture. Its epilogue portrays two events, Ferral's failure to get the French government to force the banks to support him, and a final meeting between May and Gisors. These two apparently disparate events share a common theme of futility. Ferral's failure adds yet another irony to the novel. The repression that was fueled in part by the needs of the French Consortium cannot prevent the collapse of that Consortium. The repression has lost its point, at least for the key actor that we view (Malraux has pointedly not given us access to Chiang Kai-shek's thought, the absent character who appears to be the sole successful party). Ferral's defeat underlines the absurdity of the events and suggests further that the suffering was pointless and that the events were beyond the control of any of the actors.

The final meeting between May and Gisors raises even more questions about the worth of the heroic deaths. Kyo's death has not united his two loves but has rather driven them apart. The novel ends with May and Gisors irreconcilably divided. The worlds of action and contemplation are completely severed; each has hardened into a purified but reduced position, and the ending questions the viability of either solution. May's deepened commitment to the revolution is yet another repetition of an actor, freed by death from human complications, giving herself wholly to a cause. Gisors, for his part, has retreated to opium and returned to his study of art. His contemplation is no longer in the service of humankind. Kyo's death has broken Gisors' last connection to this world, and he now sees life as only a vain effort to escape from a private self:

> "Every man is a madman," he [Gisors] went on thinking, "but what is a human destiny if not a life of effort to unite this madman and the universe. . . ." He saw Ferral again, lighted by

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> the low lamp against the background of the night full of mist. "Every man dreams of being a god. . . ." (pp. 335–36)

The novel closes on a moment of renunciation. May, who had earlier connected suffering and life through the image of childbirth, now resists the idea of having children. Her commitment is no longer to life but to vengeance and ultimately to death. Like Gisors, she has turned away from the living, and her alliance with Kyo is an alliance with death. Her turn away from childbirth and toward vengeance is her denial of an understanding that she had originally called female. With her new commitment to the revolution, May has successfully suppressed her gender. The female character who will now engage in serious political action can do so only because she has denied her womanhood.

Those critics who have argued that the novel is not political but metaphysical have seen *La Condition humaine* as a work in the tragic tradition.[32] Central to most of these readings is Pascal's *Pensée* 199 that may have been the source for the novel's title:

> If one imagined a number of men in chains and all condemned to death, of those, some each day are slaughtered in sight of the others, those who remained who see their real state in that of their fellow-creatures, and would regard the one group and the other with sadness and without hope, awaiting their own turn. This is the image of the human condition.[33]

Pascal's pessimism is consonant with Gisors' sense of the vanity of human existence.[34] Frohock argues that if Kyo and Katow do not escape from the human condition, they do transcend it. Their defeat is also a demonstration of a human refusal to submit to those forces that would deny dignity to humanity. But if, as I have suggested, both the portrayal of the deaths of Kyo and Katow and the further futility and fragmentation of the ending undermine the heroism, then the novel does not end with an assertion of a tragic heroism or tragic humanism. In a peculiar way, the ending of the novel returns to political concerns—not because it argues for or displays a political understanding, but because it demonstrates the political bankruptcy of its concept of the self. If *La Condition humaine* does not succeed in discovering an adequate concept of the self, the diverse failures of the characters point to what that concept must do. The new concept must start from premises other than that the self is private.[35] The new beginning must deal with Eros as a force in human life, and it must expand to admit a female understanding of the self. Rather than fearing a self that can only be completed by another, the new conception must hold such vulnerability as an inherent and necessary risk for any social being.

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Such an understanding would redefine the novel's political task, which would no longer be to free the self from its commitments to others as a propaedeutic to action, but to see how these commitments provide one resource for the constitution of a community of dignity.

[1] André Malraux, *Man's Fate*, trans. Haakon M. Chevalier (1934; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1969), p. 148. I have taken the quotations from Haakon M. Chevalier's translation since this is the text that most American readers would be familiar with, but I have retained Malraux's original spelling of proper names. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text.

[2] For an insightful discussion of vulnerability as an ethical problem, see Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986).

[3] Stanley Cavell provides an excellent discussion of the problem of skepticism with respect to other minds. See esp. *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 99–105.

[4] Lucien Goldmann, *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1975), p. 81.

[5] W. M. Frohock, *André Malraux and the Tragic Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1952), p. 80.

[6] Gerda Blumenthal, *André Malraux: The Conquest of Dread* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1960), p. 36.

[7] Gisors' mode of intoxication is the polar opposite of Hemmelrich or Tchen. Where they sought to free themselves in action from the anguish of the knowledge of each individual's inescapable solitude, Gisors sees all action as futile and seeks his relief in contemplation. The ethical problem of the Other that had already been displaced into epistemological terms is finally dealt with experientially through a heightened state of sensation. Gisors seeks to mitigate his despair through opium. The opium provides relief because it produces a state in which the ego gives over any fixed boundaries and the self dissolves into a fluid participation with all being. The anxiety that could not be eliminated can at least be temporarily narcotized.

[8] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey, and introd. Gregory Zilboorg (New York: Bantam Books, 1959), p. 74 and pp. 88–101.

[9] David Bevan, *Malraux: Towards the Expression of Transcendence* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1986), p. 20.

[10] Elizabeth Brody Tenenbaum, *The Problematic Self: Approaches to Identity in Stendhal, D. H. Lawrence, and Malraux* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1977), p. 118.

[11] For a good discussion of the relation between gender definition and the need for power, see Luce Irigaray's discussion of Freud, in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), esp. pp. 46–55.

[12] Thomas Jefferson Kline, *André Malraux and the Metamorphosis of Death* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 62–63.

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[13] James Robert Hewitt suggests that Malraux abandoned his concern with the adventurer-conqueror when he wrote *La Condition humaine* (*André Malraux* [New York: Ungar, 1978], p. 36). But underlying the politics of the novel's characters is the continued obsession with power, domination, and invulnerability.

[14] Blumenthal, *André Malraux*, p. 64; Catherine Savage, *Malraux, Sartre, and Aragon as Political Novelists*, University of Florida Monographs, Humanities 17 (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1964), p. 12; and David Wilkinson, *Malraux: An Essay in Political Criticism* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967), p. 68.

[15] Goldmann, *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, p. 72.

[16] Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Malraux's Women: A Re-Vision," in *Witnessing André Malraux: Visions and Revisions*, eds. Brian Thompson and Carl A. Viggiani (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1984), p. 152.

[17] James W. Greenlee, *Malraux's Heroes and History* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 1975), p. 66.

[18] Charles Blend argues that the female characters in the novel are flawed, for they act as if they were men (*André Malraux: Tragic Humanist* [Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1963], pp. 26–27). Suleiman's "Malraux's Women: A Re-Vision" provides an excellent account of the problematic treatment of women in Malraux's fiction.

[19] Denis Boak, *André Malraux* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 72.

[20] For a good discussion of the attempt to deal with skepticism with respect to other minds by making it into an epistemological rather than an ethical problem, see Stanley Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging," and "The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*," in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 238–353.

[21] Murray Krieger, *The Tragic Vision: Variations on a Theme in Literary Interpretation* (New York: Holt, 1960), p. 69.

[22] For an account of Malraux's preference for art over politics, see Blumenthal, *André Malraux*, pp. xi–xii; for an account of Kama's importance, see Savage, *Malraux, Sartre, and Aragon*, p. 13, and Boak, *André Malraux*, p. 83.

[23] In the original text, Malraux refers to *d'amour virile* (p. 361) and *le coeur viril* (p. 362), *La Condition humaine*, édition revue et corrigé (Paris: Gallimard, 1946).

[24] Frohock suggests that Chou was the model for Kyo (*André Malraux*, p. 18), but Boak has argued that Malraux actually based the character of Kyo on a Japanese writer, Kiyoshi Komatsu (*André Malraux*, pp. 68–69).

[25] Kline, *André Malraux*, p. 81.

[26] Cecil Jenkins, *André Malraux*, Twayne's New Authors Series 207 (New York: Twayne, 1972), p. 74.

[27] Violet M. Horvath, *André Malraux: The Human Adventure* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 211–15; Frohock, *André Malraux*, pp. 86–89; Greenlee, *Malraux's Heroes and History*, pp. 75–76; Wilkinson, *Malraux*, p. 63; and Goldmann, *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, pp. 79–80.

[28] For an account of a fall as an ironic reassertion of the human, see Paul De Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed., rev., introd. Wlad Godzich, Theory and History of Literature 7 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 187–229.

[29] Geoffrey Hartman, *André Malraux* (New York: Hillary House, 1960), pp. 48–49.

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[30] Boak, pp. 74–75; Jenkins, pp. 76–77; and Kline, p. 82.

[31] Tenenbaum, *The Problematic Self*, p. 148.

[32] LeRoy C. Breunig has noted that there has been a shift in Malraux criticism from a political to a metaphysical reading ("Malraux's Storm in Shanghai," *New York Literary Forum*, 3 [1979], 209–14). A number of critics now read the novel as a tragedy: Bert M-P Leefmans, "Malraux and Tragedy: The Structure of *La Condition humaine*," in *Witnessing André Malraux*, pp. 49–51; Frohock, p. 89; Greenlee, p. 76; Hartman, p. 51; Blend, p. 28; Hewitt, p. 47; and Krieger, p. 72.

[33] Blaise Pascal, *Oeuvres*, 14 vols., vol. 13, *Penseés II* (1904; rpt., Vaduz, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1965), p. 121, my translation.

[34] Gisors has a peculiar authority in the novel. Several critics have seen him as Malraux's spokesman: Edward Gannon, *The Honor of Being a Man: The World of André Malraux* (Chicago: Loyola Univ. Press, 1957), p. 59; Boak, *André Malraux*, p. 65; Jenkins, *André Malraux*, p. 63; and Tenenbaum, *The Problematic Self*, p. 138. But as Blumenthal points out, Gisors is a flawed character who lacks the courage to be (*André Malraux*, p. 49). It is possible to recognize Gisors' analytic brilliance and to see it as finally a false understanding whose failure to transcend a psychology that defines the self exclusively in terms of a private interiority reveals a major problem in the novel.

[35] Leon Trotsky's critique of Malraux's earlier novel, *The Conquerors*, argued that this book suffered from an excessive individualism ("The Strangled Revolution," in *Malraux: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. R. W. B. Lewis, Twentieth Century Views 37 [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964], p. 13). Despite the considerably greater complexity and sophistication of *La Condition humaine*, the problem of individualism remains.

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Among the Hapsburgs: Arthur Griffith, Stephen Dedalus, and the Myth of Bloom

Andras P. Ungar

Stephen's alignment with Leopold Bloom's peripatetic progress through Dublin on June 16, 1904, evokes an interesting parallel to his earlier flight to the continent and his vision of authenticity and renewal at the end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Indeed, because Bloom himself—Jew, cuckold, and son of a Hungarian immigrant—represents an extra-Irish dimension of experience, as Bloomsday lengthens Stephen's communion with him awakens yet another augury implicit in the name "Stephen," an association that, for all its apparent foreignness and distance from Dublin, was a central issue in the Irish debate over national autonomy. In place of his chosen father Daedalous, the "old artificer," who had flown from Minos' Crete, or his Christian eponym, the Protomartyr St. Stephen, whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem had first "cast . . . out of the city and [later] stoned" (*Acts* 7:57), Stephen's search for self-definition acquires a contemporary European twist, entering, by way of Bloom's desire for a son, into symbolic conjunction with a complex of meanings linked with the House of Hapsburg. Through this surprising, and to date little-noticed turn,[1] the connection with the "hawklike man" Dedalous is transformed into a link with the "*Habitschburg*, or Falcon's Castle . . . at the confluence of the Aar and the Rhine from which the [Austrian imperial] family took its name."[2] With this change, the search for kinship between Stephen and Bloom becomes a far more productive source of comment on the course of events in Ireland in 1904 than the mythological aura of Stephen's earlier self-exile could supply.

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The eponymic basis for this kinship based on Hapsburg rule is that the older half of the dynastic inheritance, Austria, enjoyed the protection of St. Leopold (1073–1125), "distinguished for his charity and self-abnegation"[3] a connection that is commemorated in Bloom's Christian name. The eastern half of the realm, meanwhile, where the Hapsburgs reigned as Kings of Hungary—that is, Hungary, Croatia, Transylvania, and most of Slovakia—was the legacy of the Crown of St. Stephen, commemorating Stephen, Hungary's patron saint, and the Magyar nation's first Christian ruler.

Joyce had strong political reasons for conceiving of the Leopold Bloom-Stephen Dedalus encounter in this particular context. Because of Hungary's success in forcing the Hapsburgs to recognize its constitutional autonomy, mention of Austria-Hungary was a shibboleth in Irish politics. Recourse to the example of Austria-Hungary invoked the potential constitutional settlement of relations between England and Ireland on terms of equality, the desirability, most immediately, of ending the country's constitutional annexation to Westminster.

The parallel between Austria-Hungary and England-Ireland had received broad recognition for a long time. Yeats, for example, in his poem in honor of the martyrs of the 1848 revolution, "How Ferenc Renyi Kept Silent," saluted Hungary as the "nation of the bleeding breast" with "Libations, from the Hungary of the West."[4] Unionists in 1886 denounced the comparison of Irish Home Rule and the powers of the Hungarian Diet by Lord Salisbury as a sure foretaste of betrayal.[5] And indeed, some months later, Gladstone instanced the comparative "solidity and safety" of Austria's sharing of power with Hungary in favor of his ill-fated Home Rule Bill.[6] The context most immediately relevant to the Dublin of 1904, however, originated with Arthur Griffith. In a series of articles published from January through July in the *United Irishman*, he argued that Hungarian success had reversed a long-standing relationship between the Irish and Hungarian national liberation movements:

> "Sixty years ago, and more, Ireland was Hungary's exemplar. Ireland's heroic and long-enduring resistance to the destruction of her independent nationality were themes the writers of Hungary dwelt upon to enkindle and make resolute the Magyar people. The poet-precursors of Free Hungary . . . drank in Celtic inspiration, and the journalists of Young Hungary taught their people that Ireland had baffled a tyranny as great as that which threatened death to Hungary. Times have changed and Hungary is now Ireland's great exemplar."[7]

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Griffith proposed that Irish nationalists adopt the successful tactics of the Hungarian leader Ferenc Deak. He advocated a boycott of the parliamentary maneuvering at Westminster. Elected members were to refuse to take their seats. Such a boycott by Hungary of the Imperial Diet had resulted in the Hapsburg capitulation to Hungarian demands after her defeat by Prussia in 1866.[8] The aim of Irish nationalists should be "the placing of the relations of Great Britain and Ireland on exactly the same footing as the relations now existing between Austria and Hungary . . . [No] Irish Nationalist can, without abandoning principle accept less, though he may seek more."[9] If Ireland were to share a king with England, the monarch would have to be crowned King of Ireland and be responsible to an Irish Parliament. Through passive resistance, Griffith wanted Ireland to insist on the recognition of sovereignty which the Irish Volunteers had wrung from Britain in 1783.[10] The Act of Union of 1800 was to be regarded as illegal.

Griffith's articles were issued as a pamphlet, *The Resurrection of Hungary: A Parallel for Ireland* (1904), and caused quite a stir. The style was passionate and vivid. In dramatizing Ferenc Deak's unwavering purpose over the course of nearly two decades, Griffith was, in fact, offering Ireland—to quote Padraic Colum's biography—"a parable [and] if one is careful not to use the word in a derogatory sense, a myth—an arousing myth."[11] T. M. Kettle, though a member of the Parliamentary Party, called it "the largest idea contributed to Irish politics for a generation."[12] It split Sinn Fein, with Bulmer Hobson, a nationalist leader in the North, arguing that the Hungarian policy meant a break with the Fenian tradition and the acceptance of something less than total national independence.[13]

Joyce's response to Griffith's new direction was predictably complicated. A regular reader of Griffith's paper, he supported the break with parliamentarianism. The parliamentary option had been bankrupt, in his eyes, since Parnell's fall. He supported the practical economic features of the program: the call for the creation of a national bank, the emphasis on industrial diversification, the proposal for a consular service to promote Irish exports.[14] But the analogy at the heart of the Hungarian policy—the mythologizing of Hungary's progress to equality with Austria—he rejected. In *Stephen Hero*, he has Stephen castigate the rigidity and selective blindness of the simplification of history he sensed in the position:

> A glowing example was to be found for Ireland in the case of Hungary, an example, as these patriots imagined, of a long-suffering minority, entitled by every right of race and

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> justice to a separate freedom, finally emancipating itself. In emulation of that achievement bodies of young Gaels conflicted murderously in the Phoenix Park with whacking hurley-sticks, thrice armed in their just quarrel since their revolution had been blessed for them by the anointed, and the same bodies were set aflame with indignation by the unwelcome presence of any young skeptic who was aware of the capable aggressions of the Magyars upon the Latin and Slav and Teutonic populations, greater than themselves in number, who are politically allied to them. . . .[15]

There was a "Cuchulain" type of posturing in Sinn Fein. Crude idealizations, the heroicizing of Ireland and her friends, and demonization of Britain and her allies, deformed the understanding of the issues at stake.

In his correspondence, Joyce, moreover, objected to Griffith's claim that the 1904 anti-Semitic pogrom in Limerick could be justified as deserved because of greedy exploitative behavior by a non-Zionist majority among Jews. He also found objectionable Griffith's spirited defense of the French anti-Dreyfusards.[16] He felt that a mythologizing of Ireland's difficulties by substituting a rhetoric formed from national stereotypes for an analysis of social complexity would be tantamount to educating "the people of Ireland on the old pap of racial hatred."[17]

By 1915, moreover, the second year that he was writing *Ulysses* and the year when Italy's declaration of war on the side of the Allies forced him from Trieste into his second exile, Joyce's general experience of the Hapsburg monarchy was far more comprehensive than anything available in Griffith's propagandistic summary. By then, he had spent eleven years, one third of his life, living under Hapsburg rule.[18] From Paris, he was to look back on his experience of Hapsburg government as having been one of the lesser evils among the forms of rule he had known. "They called it a ramshackle empire . . . I wish to God there were more such empires," he told Padraic Colum. He appreciated, according to Colum, "the mellowness of life there . . . [and] the fact that the state [had] tried to impose so little upon its own or upon other people. It was not war-like, it was not efficient, and its bureaucracy was not strict, it was the country for a peaceful man."[19]

The consequence of this familiarity is that *Ulysses*' treatment of the analogy between Irish national liberation and the Austro-Hungarian *Ausgleich* is a far more finely modulated performance than Griffith's. Joyce reverses the approach of *The Resurrection of Hungary*. Instead of Griffith's synthetic overview of the British and Hapsburg polities, the dense texture of Bloomsday Dublin becomes the locus of the

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comparison. Daily life in Dublin, where the political scenario Griffith proposed would, in the final accounting, have to be staged, becomes the test of its relevance.

Joyce focuses his commentary on Leopold Bloom's effort to situate his Hungarian origins in the Irish present. In other words, the family myth of Bloom functions as a form of commentary on the myth of the *Ausgleich* Griffith had publicized. In fact, the link between the two is so insistent that the myth of Bloom very nearly usurps and altogether subsumes Griffith's account. "In the castle," according to both Martin Cunningham and John Wyse Nolan, Bloom is recognized as the "perverted Jew . . . from a place in Hungary . . . who drew up all the plans according to the Hungarian system" (p. 276).

This is a considerable burden of historical responsibility to assign Bloom, especially as nowhere among the ruminations of the day does he display the kind of historical imagination evident in *The Resurrection of Hungary*.[20] There is, as Robert M. Adams has observed, something adventitious, and unreal, about the attribution of Sinn Fein strategy to him. "Arthur Griffith's Hungarian policy is not in fact, within the range of Bloom's character," writes Adams. "He was not born within Hungary; he knows (from what we can tell) very little about the country, in fact he hardly ever thinks of it; he has no Hungarian acquaintances."[21] From the point of view of the city, however, he is ideally cast for the role. His "status in the Dublin Community is," in Bernard Benstock's words, "a dubious one: he has kept his inmost thoughts to himself and become a subject of wild speculation. . . . Few have taken the trouble to get to know him well, and he has therefore become an almost mythic figure."[22] At the very least, the Bloom-Griffith connection stands as a Joycean comment on the misinformed rumor-mill that passed for public opinion in Dublin.

As the composition of *Ulysses* progressed, however, Joyce would have had an excellent reason for reviewing his character's link with Griffith and Hungary and treating the connection more seriously. Late 1919 through to 1922, the first period of Joyce's residence in Paris, the time during which he worked on "Circe," "Eumaeus," "Ithaca," and "Penelope," and revised the fourteen earlier chapters that had already been published in the *Little Review*,[23] was also the period when Irish representatives elected in December 1918 attempted to apply Griffith's Hungarian policy to Ireland in the measure that Irish realities allowed. Because it would have meant a tacit recognition of the basis of English rule, they had not gone to sit at Westminster. They constituted themselves as the Dail Eireann and, de facto, sought to displace Dublin

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Castle from local administration. But the work of the Gaelic League and the hurley-stick militancy Stephen had mocked in *Stephen Hero* had contributed to the making of an Ireland in which Griffith's ideal of a peaceful boycott was outdated. In the aftermath of the Easter Rebellion, the Dail would not invoke the legitimacy of Grattan's Parliament. Sinn Fein demanded the establishment of an Irish republic. Dual power in an Irish context did not translate into passive resistance but into national division and civil war.[24]

Ulysses, through one strand of its labyrinthine design, comments on this deviation, by 1922 so glaringly wide of the mark, from Griffith's constitutional hopes based on the Hapsburg experience. The means of this commentary is the exploration of Bloom's family origins in Austro-Hungary and of the way in which these origins affect his concept of paternity. Central to the design, of course, is Bloom's lack of a son, the break in the tradition of patrilineal descent manifest in his "family custom of giving Hapsburg names to males (Leopold–Rudolph–Leopold–Rudolph)."[25] Bloom laments this, knowing that there is "none now to be for Leopold, what Leopold was for Rudolph" (p. 338), the lack of which, on Bloomsday, prods him toward Stephen. Stephen's adoption as his son in place of the dead Rudy would bring a kind of ideal order to Bloom's life analogous to the deus ex machina solution to dilemmas of Irish nationalism that Griffith's effort to adapt English-Irish politics to an Austro-Hungarian constitutional model would represent. Bloom's failure to adopt Stephen as his heir is paralleled by the failure of the Hapsburg model as Griffith conceived it to accommodate Irish developments. Joyce's implication seems to be that Griffith's project is no more realistic, and able to chart the nuances of Irish life at the turn of the century, than Bloom is able to understand and adequately respond to Stephen's complicated needs.

Looked at this way, Bloom's progress through the city of Dublin toward Stephen constitutes a distant extension of the trajectory of his father Rudolph Virag-Bloom's initial emigration westward from Hungary. The list of the cities that had served as stages of Rudolph's journey foregrounds the theme of the redistribution of political sovereignty among capitals, which in Griffith's view had been justly apportioned between Budapest and Vienna, two of the capitals noted as Rudolph's stopping places. The trajectory of the journey focuses this concern on Dublin.

"What first reminiscence had he of Rudolph Bloom (deceased)?"

"Rudolph Bloom (deceased) narrated to his son Leopold Bloom

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> (aged 6) a retrospective arrangement of migrations and settlements in and between Dublin, London, Florence, Milan, Vienna, Budapest, Szombathely with statements of satisfaction (his grandfather having seen Maria Theresia [sic], empress of Austria, queen of Hungary), with commercial advice. . . ." (p. 595)

Rudolph's itinerary had traversed seven cities, or rather six cities and a town, for Szombathely, his point of origin, was merely the seat of a Hungarian county; the next two, the capitals, respectively, of Hungary and Austria, had not appeared in the Rosenbach holograph and were inserted into the paragraph in late 1921 or early in 1922 when Joyce was correcting Darantiere's proofs.[26] Milan and Florence had been the chief cities of Hapsburg-ruled Italy. Florence had been the capital of a separate though Hapsburg-ruled principality, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. Milan, meanwhile, had a diminished claim to being a capital at all, since the Austrian Emperor had refused to be crowned there; he ruled as though it were the chief city of an Austrian province, ignoring the Congress of Vienna's having made the city the capital of a separate kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia.[27] Finally, apart from imperial London, there is only kingless Dublin containing Stephen—etymologically from the Greek: *Stephanos*, or crown—whom Leopold would integrate into the Virag-Bloom lineage. Mediated by the symbolic configuration of Bloom's paternal desire, Dublin is potentially a coronation town in a sequence of coronation towns with a right to its place in the order as problematic as Stephen's relationship to Bloom.

This complexity has several related aspects. Can a substantial equivalence be postulated between individuals or nations? Does the ideal of national sovereignty, symbolized by a separate constitution or a separate crown, postulate such equivalence? What sorts of identity can be abstracted from national and religious differences? from Bloom and Stephen? from Hungary and Ireland? The choice of Szombathely as starting point of Rudolph's odyssey suggests a rare awareness on Joyce's part of these difficulties. It may be, as he noted in "Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages," that "Nations have their egos, just like individuals."[28] The nature of the mediations among such different identities, however, cannot be taken for granted.

Instead of a starting place, Szombathely is already a point of convergence. The literal meaning of the town's name is "Saturday-place," which probably appealed to Joyce because it seemed already to allude, in the Hungarian language and in a Hungarian context, to Virag's Jewish origins. In fact, the allusion is a red herring. Szombathely

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derives its name not from an association with Jews but from the fairs that took place in the town on Saturdays when Jews, of all people, would have been the least likely to go.[29] The red herring draws attention to the fact that Virag in Hungary was already a stranger, his link to town only an accident. In addition, the false initial connotation of the Hungarian place name becomes a reminder that the original family name "Virag," the Hungarian term for "flower," was not Bloom's original family name but already a translation into the Hungarian from an earlier form of a migrating Jewish name. At the outset of the odyssey that leads eventually to Stephen Dedalus, then, neither the town nor the traveler Virag appears as a transparent identity that may later function as a point of easy reference. The town is only apparently Jewish and Virag, whose family name shows a commitment to Hungarianization, most readily spoke, we later learn, to his son Leopold in German (p. 358).

Another derivation, however, makes Szombathely as essential to the order of coronation towns as it was to Virag's journey. The town may—like Virag the emigrant—seem the stranger in the sequence of capitals and capitals manqué. In fact, Szombathely endows the theme of imperial connection with a historical dimension more ancient than the horizons of either the Hapsburgs or the Hanoverians could make available.

Szombathely, *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1911) notes, "occupies the site of the Roman town [Sabaria Savaria] which was the capital of Pannonia where in A.D. 193 Septimus Severus was proclaimed emperor by his legions."[30] Frequently visited by emperors, it had been "the centre of the Pannonian emperor cult."[31] It is the earliest Eastern European capital in the line of descent from the emperors of Rome, by way of the Holy Roman emperors, and, after Napoleon abolished that anachronism, to the Hapsburgs as emperors of Austria, and then, through Disraeli's appreciation of the connection of politics and pomp, to Victoria and her immediate heirs, the English empresses and emperors of India. Szombathely's submerged identity anticipates the younger capitals' claims to sovereignty and, in the oblivion that has obscured its early eminence, points to the inevitable gaps that arise in a process of historical translation.

In Dublin, the odyssey's terminal point, Rudolph's son Leopold attempts to surmount just such a break—the hiatus resulting from Rudy's death—by drawing closer to Stephen Dedalus. Stephen also suffers from a translation difficulty in his quest for self-expression. Uneasy with Irish national ideals, as his abortive project of self-exile

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showed, Stephen recognizes that, in spite of the hostility he feels toward British imperialism, his past and the past of his country have committed to writing in English. The ideal identity Stephen seeks is parodically invoked in the composite historical personage "Rutlandbaconsouthamptonshakespeare," an ideal fusion (hence safe from nitpicking over his actual identity or origin), which represents a culmination of personal autonomy through self-filiation, a creative solution with the advantage of being, at one and the same time, fantastic, individual, and national.

> "When Rutlandbaconsouthamptonshakespeare or another poet of the same name in the comedy of errors wrote *Hamlet* he was not the father of his own son merely but, being no more a son, he was and felt himself the father of all his race, the father of his grandfather, the father of his unborn grandson. . . ." (p. 171)

When Bloom takes Stephen home, the integration that the trajectory of Rudolph Virag-Bloom's emigration had anticipated intersects with this mode of unification which is of moment to Stephen. In other words, the symbolic movement sketched from Szombathely through the various capitals to the house at number 7 Eccles Street—Dublin, the seventh city of Christendom, had figured as the seventh in Virag's list of cities—almost comes, at least for a celestial instant, to accommodate Stephen's ideal, Shakespeare. The moment of near synthesis is the highly ambiguous seriocomic stellification-apotheosis that the text speculates about as Leopold Bloom and Stephen watch the night sky in "Ithaca." The text describes the links between Shakespeare, Rudy, and the two watchers as relations analogous, or nearly so, to the sequence of *novae coronae*, that is, new stars, or, etymologically from the Latin, *new crowns*, which had more or less coincided with their respective births. They discuss, we are told:

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> from some other constellations some years before or after the birth or death of other persons. . . ." (p. 575)

In this alignment of Rudolf-Leopold with Shakespeare-Stephen the possibility of equivalence is entertained only to be denied. Indeed, the incomplete, and fundamentally unserious, correlation of Bloom's, Stephen's, Shakespeare's, and Rudy's births with novae seems to point to the archaic nature of a symbolism of equivalence based on crowns and crowning, and, by extension, of an understanding of individuals and of national movements aiming at autonomy and communication that accepts the rule of such symbols.

Is there an alternative to such archaic ways of thinking? In "Cyclops" Bloom does attempt to stand on a different kind of ground. Mocked, in Barney Kiernan's, by the fiery (and beery) nationalists who would deny him the right to call himself an Irishman, he is determined not to yield. A nation, Bloom tells them, "is the same people living in the same place" (p. 272). His definition is ridiculed. Soon afterward, the drunken Citizen, enraged that Bloom has claimed Christ as a fellow-Jew, threatens to execute him for blasphemy. He flings a "biscuit box," a mock-ciborium, at Bloom, who, in a kind of symbolic regression along the trajectory of Rudolph Virag-Bloom's emigration, retreats into a glorious incarnation, crowds of well-wishers cheering. He becomes his own grandfather, "Nagyasagos [sic] uram Lipoti Virag" (p. 280); the middle-class honorific translates approximately as "esquire." His elevation from the stamping ground of Dublin's racist chauvinists turns out, moreover, to have been merely a prolegomenon to a still higher destiny. As the biscuit box strikes the ground:

> "lo, there came about them all a great brightness and they beheld the chariot wherein He stood ascend to heaven. And they beheld Him in the chariot, clothed upon the glory of the brightness, having raiment as of the sun, fair as the moon and terrible that for awe they durst not look upon Him. And there came a voice out of heaven, calling *Elijah! Elijah!* And He answered with a main cry: *Abba! Adonai!* And they beheld Him even Him, ben Bloom Elijah, amid clouds of angels ascend to the glory of the brightness at an angle of fortyfive degrees over Donohoe's in Little Green street like a shot off a shovel." (p. 283)

As "ben Bloom Elijah"—still a son the Hebrew "ben" insists—Bloom is safe at the culminating point of a movement of self-filiation that leaves him transcendent in a heavenly, albeit parodic, exile. Still, even the identity of the transcendent "ben Bloom Elijah" is only an apparent resolution of Bloom's alienation. The mission of the prophet Elijah, we

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must recall, had been to "turn the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to the fathers . . ." (*Mal.* 4:5). Bloom's situation is such that he has nowhere to turn.

An earthquake, a metaphor for his sonless, fatherless, and nationless exile, separates him from his persecutors. The moment the Citizen's biscuit box struck the roadway, it raised "eleven shocks, all of the fifth grade of Mercalli's scale . . . [and] a violent atmospheric perturbation of cyclonic character" (p. 281). The eleven seismic shocks of this catastrophe echo the eleven days of Rudy's short life.[32] Linked to two Rudolphs, Bloom as Elijah cannot turn to either. Rudolph his son died of birth defects, Rudolph his father, of suicide, by poison.

His reiterated isolation resonates with a notorious Hapsburg parallel: the death of the imperial heir, the Crown Prince Rudolf, under mysterious and much speculated-on circumstances, on January 30, 1889.[33] The Crown Prince died at a private hunting lodge at Mayerling, a setting to which Bloom's recollection of his father's death in a hotel room "with hunting pictures" (p. 80) seems to allude. The corpse of Crown Prince Rudolf, aged thirty, and the corpse of his eighteen-year-old mistress, Mary Vetsera, were discovered together in bed. The two had, it seemed, fulfilled a suicide pact.

The scandal was a long and trying affair for the Hapsburg court. Why should a young man, the only son of the Emperor Franz Joseph and the Empress Elizabeth, in apparent good health and with Rudolf's prospects, have suddenly killed himself? The court issued contradictory accounts of the death. At first apoplexy was blamed; then a self-inflicted gunshot wound was admitted. Although rumors were rife, mention of suicide was verboten lest it impede Catholic burial. Every effort was made to hide all connection between Mary Vetsera's death and the Hapsburg tragedy. In unofficial accounts, a malformation of Rudolf's skull and the possibility of an inherited "Wittelsbach" madness were rumored.[34] There were suggestions that Rudolf had been pursuing his own "Hungarian " policy, promoting the interests of some Hungarian magnates against those of the Emperor, his father. In spite of the general fascination with the case—reflected in T. S. Eliot's allusions to it in "The Waste Land" for example[34]—the Austrian court refused to clarify matters further or even to explain the contradictions in its reports of what had happened. Rudolf's place as Crown Prince fell to Franz Ferdinand, Franz Joseph's nephew, who would, in turn, fall to an assassin's bullet in Sarajevo. The interest and emotions surrounding Rudolf's strange death, meanwhile, would not fade. When the Countess Marie Larisch-Wallersee, who had been the go-between in

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Rudolf's love affair, tried to publish her memoirs in 1897, the Emperor Franz Joseph forestalled her, by purchasing and burning the manuscript.[36]

This Hapsburg family crisis as subtext to the Rudy-less Bloom's orphaned eventual ascension to glory as ben Bloom Elijah from the raging Citizen composes an image that shows Joyce at his most scatological. Nagyasagos uram Lipoti Virag's destination is "the distant clime of Szazharminczbrojugulyas-Dugulas [Meadow of the Murmuring Waters]" (p. 280). The Hungarian part of the address—allowing for the misspelling of "borju," not "broju," that is "veal" or "calf"—reads "one hundred and thirty veal gulyas blockage or constipation," combining an allusion to January 30 or 1/30, the date of the Crown Prince Rudolf's suicide, with a reference to Hungary's national dish.[37] The entire address, in conjunction with the bracketed English pseudo-translation, directs Leopold-become-his-own-grandfather to the water-closet, where the blockage of generation, the extinction of Rudolph, father and son, the end of "dynasty," culminates in the image of a clogged "murmuring" toilet bowl, recalling an earlier description of Ireland as a "pleasant land . . . of murmuring waters . . ." (p. 241). In terms of the tradition he inherited, Bloom, like Ireland, has, in the eyes of Joyce the exile, come to a dead end, in an anatomically exact and ludicrous sense.

The identity of Lipoti Virag, like the role of ben Bloom Elijah, represents a possible escape. Lipoti is immune to the tauntings of Bloom's enemies because he has remained in Europe. Grandfather Lipoti has, moreover, unlike his grandson Leopold, fathered a Rudolf. Finally, he represents safety because he is a gigantic exaggeration. Just as the Cyclopean extravagances of Irish nationalist rhetoric represent an overcompensation for cultural domination by England, in his recourse to the mask of Lipoti Virag, Bloom has also overcompensated. In "Circe," Virag is depicted as a convulsive, mechanical, ill-focused dispenser of pornographic lore, the author of a multivolume *Fundamentals of Sexology* (p. 420) that makes public "the Sex Secrets of Monks and Maidens" (p. 423). He represents an unfocused form of libidinal energy that causes him to twitch grotesquely and drives him to polysyllabic examinations of the anatomies of the Nighttown whores and to sudden unpredictable emissions of animal sounds. He cannot control the spasms of the force that he focuses. Yet for Bloom, this figure, this vacillating compromise with chaotic self-abandonment, is the "father of all his race," the father of a father such as he himself is precluded from becoming, his "granpappachi."

The initial description of Lipoti sets "granpappachi" before his

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descendant in a composite shape that includes, and thus domesticates, a variety of features familiar to contemporary Dublin life that Bloom finds disturbing (or, in the allusion to Stephen, will shortly find puzzling):

> *Lipoti Virag, basilicogrammate, chutes rapidly down through the chimney flue and struts two steps to the left on gawky pink stilts. He is sausaged into several overcoats and wears a brown mackintosh under which he holds a roll of parchment. In his left eye flashes the monocle of Cashel Boyle O'Connor Fitzmaurice Tisdall Farrell. On his head is perched an Egyptian pshent. Two quills project over his ears.* (p. 417)

Hailed as "basilicogrammate" or lord of language (recalling Stephen's antinomian claim in the Hospital to be "Bous Stephanoumenos, bullockbefriending bard, lord and giver of life"), caricatured as an Egyptian Thoth on stilt legs that parody Stephen's vision of woman in the "likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird [with] . . . long slender bare legs delicate as a crane's" in *A Portrait* (p. 171), Lipoti also recalls the automaton-like eccentric Cashel Boyle O'Connor Fitzmaurice Tisdall Farrell, who, anticipating Lipoti Virag's cry "Pollysyllabax" (p. 418), "parafes his polysyllables" in the "constant readers' room" of the National Library (p. 177), and, in marked contrast with Bloom's empathy with the youth, brutally buffets the blind stripling aside in the "Wandering Rocks" episode (p. 205). The mackintosh he is "sausaged into" aligns him with the enigma of the stranger at Paddy Dignam's funeral whose attendance, that of one M'Intosh, the press account perversely notes just as it deprives Bloom of a fraction of his public identity, miscasting him as L. Boom, a noise (p. 529). The embodiment of locomotor ataxy (the locomotor apparatus is the organ of "Circe") this fantastic figure, who, in an earlier draft of the episode had been labeled "Bloom's double,"[38] here seems to represent, not any link such as Bloom needs, but a restless, exaggerated, and, on principle, only partially legible, instinctual alternative to stable identity of any kind.

The natural alternative to Lipoti, the natural complement of Bloom's need to stand in the line of his fathers, is, of course, Rudy. The lexicon of coronation regalia further elaborates this way of completing his identity. Whereas a relationship with Stephen or *Stephanos*, or *nova corona* or crown, represents one symbolic mode of access from June 16, 1904, back into a dialogue with the fathers with whom Bloom has broken, the relationship with Rudy, the break that cannot be repaired, comes to be symbolized by another symbolic correlate of monarchical sovereignty, the ruler's ring, and, even more insistently, by the stone set in the ring, the ruby. Despite the emphatically public nature of

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coronation regalia symbolism, this articulation of Bloom's need for a son by these means reaches the most vulnerable and resonant core of his individuality: the absence of adult sexual relations in his marriage to Molly, and the passivity in his own nature responsible for it. The associations of the ruler's ring (beginning with the obvious rhyme between Rudy and ruby) trace Bloom's inchoate attempts to make himself a father, to embody the inchoate and phantasmal Lipoti.

The first prominent occurrence of a "ring" is in "Calypso." It appears in the title of the erotic novel Bloom brought Molly, as a kind of vicarious compensation for the absence of full conjugal relations. The name of the heroine of the novel, "Ruby," of course, evokes the couple's dead son. The subtitle "Pride of the Ring" provides ironic commentary in two senses. The literal reference is to the circus ring in Molly's novel where Ruby is celebrated for her performances without the audience's guessing how badly the circus owner is maltreating her.[39] The second reference is to the Blooms' marriage where there is no Rudy, no such "Pride of the Ring."[40]

The connection between the circus ring and Bloom's disappointment in his marriage is picked up again in "Ithaca" at the crucial instant when Stephen and Bloom negotiate the possibility of their seeing each other again, an eventuality that would constitute a more enduring bond, suggestive of Stephen's acceptance of something like paternal dependence. Bloom reasons that the future meetings they project are unlikely ever to occur. The panoptic, all-comprehending narrative lens of the chapter cites his reason for doubting, the memory of an encounter with a circus performer who had, unknowingly, ridiculed his deep desire for a son. This is the paradigmatic instance behind Bloom's belief in the "irreparability of the past":

> "once at a performance of Albert Hengler's circus in the Rotunda, Rutland square, Dublin, an intuitive particoloured clown in quest of paternity had penetrated from the *ring* to a place in the auditorium where Bloom, solitary, was seated and had publicly declared to an exhilarated audience that he (Bloom) was his (the clown's) papa." (p. 571; emphasis added)

His procuring *Ruby: Pride of the Ring* for Molly compensates for this memory. At the same time, however, it places the issue of Bloom's infertility in an atmosphere charged with violence. The circus performer in the novel endured sadistic abuse.

> "*Ruby: Pride of the Ring*. Hello. Illustration. Fierce Italian with carriagewhip. Must be Ruby pride of the ring on the floor naked.

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> Sheet kindly lent. *The monster Maffei desisted and flung his victim from him with an oath.* Cruelty behind it. Doped animals." (p. 52)

In symbolic form, his book for Molly preserves the hurt Rudy had suffered. He believes, moreover, as does Molly, that the responsibility for failing to produce a healthy son devolves on the husband, not on the woman (p. 79). The sadism of the circus-master's treatment of Ruby reflects an accusation and violence that Bloom has internalized.

In "Circe" he tries, in several ways, to come to terms with the potential for harm within himself. His bestowal of a ruby ring on the phantom of his old flame Josie [Powell] Breen is tantamount to a magical effort to deny the irreparability of the past, and to reestablish himself with a woman in a prelapsarian state. Along with the gift, he quotes a snatch from the song of seduction from *Don Giovanni*, "Then we'll go hand in hand,"[41] which was an item in the program Boylan was to deliver to Molly in the afternoon. By appropriating the song—Boylan's gift to Molly—and making it an accompaniment of his gift to Josie, he is, in effect, substituting for Boylan in his courtship of Molly, and, vicariously, displacing the rival (p. 52). The ruby ring magically perfects the union as the birth of Rudy should have fulfilled his marriage. But as the allusion to Boylan's very real afternoon in Bloom's home indicates, the shadow of pain, or, more exactly, a train of self-lacerating masochism has reached even into this idyll. Singing Boylan's song, Bloom is a kind of voyeur at his own cuckolding, or, on an even more hapless view, he is making use of the thought of Boylan to be enabled, at least vicariously, to have sex with Molly.

Otherwise, the memory of Rudy separates him from Molly. That the life from his loins could have so quickly, so prematurely, died is a wound that Bloom feels so keenly that in the instant of his advance toward Josie, he also shrinks away from the possible consequence of his advance. Earlier in the exchange, she had praised the young Leopold Bloom, recalling that she had known him for a "lion of the night" (p. 363), but Leopold, his name to the contrary, will be anything but leonine. As he holds Josie's hand, in fact, his gesture inverts the role of his eponym in the fable recalling the danger of Androcles, not the injured lion's menace. The lines from *Hamlet* he calls on to evoke the night long ago, the "dear dead days beyond recall" (p. 363) of their youth, point to death: " 'The witching hour of night. I took the splinter out of this hand, carefully and slowly. (tenderly, as he slips on her finger a ruby ring) *La ci darem la mano*' " (p. 364).

In the play, the phrase "the witching hour of the night" appears in the soliloquy after the performance of "The Mousetrap": the scene in

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which the prince, about to confront his mother, had resolved "to be cruel, not unnatural / . . . to speak daggers to her, but use none" (*Hamlet* III.iii.363–64), to confront the corrupt woman, the adulteress, but not harm her. Bloom's Androcles-like approach pivots uncertainly between the desire for revenge and rectification, and the determination to originate no wrong. The lines in the play implied ominous consequences.

> 'Tis now the very witching hour of the night,
> When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breaths out
> Contagion to this world.
> (*Hamlet*, III.iii.356–58)

Bloom's desire links the grave and the conjugal bed. He makes this connection quite explicit—once again by means of the Hamlet soliloquy—when he contemplates the cemetery caretaker John O'Connell's marriage prospects in "Hades":

> "Wonder he had the gumption to propose to any girl. Come out and live in the graveyard. Dangle that before her. It might thrill her first. Courting death. Shades of night hovering here with all the dead stretched about. The shadows of the tombs when the churchyards yawn. . . ." (p. 89)

This threat Bloom senses in woman is dramatized in the confrontation with the cigar-chomping whoremaster Bello Cohen, a Circean transformation of the brothel owner Bella Cohen turned into a man in order that Bloom, continuing the pattern of shrinking from the consequences of masculinity, might endure the violence he fears in the shape of a woman. Bello forces Bloom to undergo a series of bestial metamorphoses with a cruel disdain that recalls the "doped animals" in Molly's circus novel with whose suffering Bloom had empathized. Bello orders him to "shed [his] male garments" and, again drawing on Molly's novel, decrees that he is to be called Ruby Cohen (p. 436). Then Bello, emulating Bloom's courting of Josie, "places a ruby ring on [Ruby Cohen's] finger" and insists on his gratitude: " 'And there now! with this ring I thee own. Say, *Thank you, mistress*' " (p. 439). Bloom, with gratitude sadistically enforced, has become his own wife and his own child. He has made good the demands of the ring symbolism and the lack in his marriage in the figure of his own body.

This complex of meaning shifts to a political context with Bloom's coronation as "Leopold the First," the "undoubted emperor-president and king-chairman, the most serene and potent and very puissant ruler of [the] realm." Borrowing from Griffith's description of the coronation of Franz Joseph, Bloom is crowned with "St. Stephen's iron crown" (p.

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392),[42] recalling Stephen Dedalus and his vision of autonomy. Anointed with "a cruse of hairoil . . . [Bloom then] assumes a mantle of cloth of gold." Replicating his gift to Josie Breen and his enslavement by Bello, he "puts . . . a ruby ring" on his own finger. Then he "ascends and stands on the stone of destiny" (p. 393) or Stone of Scone, traditionally identified with the Tanist Stone or the Lia-Fail, "the monolith erected by the ancient Gaelic kings at their coronations."[43] In a fantastically parodic fashion, Bloom has found a way to Tara.[44]

As Leopold the First, wearing both crown and ruby ring, Bloom stands sovereign and complete. He needs neither Josie, nor Bello, nor Molly. The embodiment of sovereign Ireland, he chooses a new consort. He bestows his "royal hand upon the princess Selene, the splendour of the night" (p. 393), not a human female, but, appropriately enough in the land of the Celtic twilight, the goddess of the moon.[45] Bloom's dream of transcendence carries him into the regions of myth.

Of special relevance to this transcendent union is the tradition of the English coronation ceremonial that deemed the finger on which the ring was to be placed "the 'marrying finger' [and] . . . the coronation ring . . . 'the wedding ring of England.' "[46] By putting the ring on his own finger, Bloom, like Napoleon, who had placed the crown on his own head, is making a rare claim to autonomy—to the right to remake the conditions that have made him, a right which, like Napoleon's, would be sui generis; the connotations of the ruby ring, at this climactic instant, however, imply that Bloom, womanless, his Molly entertaining Boylan, is, in a fashion, marrying himself. His moon goddess is a false dream. In effect, the symbolism of the ceremony recalls Buck Mulligan's projected production of "*Everyman His own Wife*" (p. 178) and his jeering boast "I am big with child. I have an unborn child in my brain" (p. 171). Bloom, in the guise of Ireland triumphant, is depicted as committed to a configuration that is onanistic and sterile, to a symbolic complement of the vainglorious vision Le Fecondateur, Mulligan, salvation in the shape of "a national fertilising farm to be named *Omphalos*" where he would dispense "fecundation [to] any female of what grade of life soever who should there direct to him with the desire of fulfilling the functions of her natural" (p. 329).

Stephen and Rudy, virtually present in this apotheosis through Bloom's costume, appear together once again in the daguerreotype described in "Ithaca." In this even more analytically acute design of the limitations besetting Bloom's project of self-completion, they once again have human forms.

The object brings together a Stefan (or Stephen), a Rudolf (or

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Rudy), and a Leopold (Lipoti or Bloom), all members of the Virag family. In the daguerreotype, in other words, a version of the synthesis toward which Bloom has moved through the day is realized. It is described as "'An indistinct daguerreotype of Rudolf Virag and his father Leopold Virag executed in the year 1852 in the portrait atelier of their respective 1st and 2nd cousin, Stefan Virag of Szesfehervar, Hungary'" (p. 594).

The text alludes to Stephen Dedalus in several ways. Most immediately Stefan, like Stephen, is a kind of artist. In addition, the name of the inventor of the medium, Da Guerro, and the verb "execute" recall Stephen's nickname, "Kinch the Knifeblade" (p. 4), and his "dagger definitions" (p. 153). Still, between Stefan and Stephen, there is one essential difference. In Stephen's terms, Stefan cannot be a real artist.

His work is compromised by its medium. Joyce's Paris notebook of 1903, which, like Ithaca, is ordered catechistically (and from which the Stephen of *A Portrait* would inherit views on aesthetic questions) explained that in photography a medium which is not human dominates human purpose. Accordingly, photography cannot achieve the dignity of art. In the photograph "sensible matter may be disposed for an aesthetic end," but the disposition is not "a human disposition of sensible matter."[47] The photographer "writes with light," but he remains blocked and ruled by the bluntness of his instrument, a hostage to the obtuseness of matter. Therefore, in relation to the vision of art-qua-stasis that had inspired Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait*, the work of Stefan Virag, the Stephen-double, represents a kind of inner paralysis, an infirmity of expression that parallels the failure of Bloom's own effort to adopt and re-form Stephen, to express him in his own terms. The implication is that were Stephen's horizons, as Bloom desires, to be subordinated to the model of unification based on the crown and the ring, the result would be tantamount to a grotesque monumentalization of the youth's creativity.

The choice of Szekesfehervar as the site of Stefan Virag's atelier—there is no "Szesfehervar"—adds a historical dimension to this theme of domination by matter. Szekesfehervar, the seat of a Hungarian county, had, in Joyce's day as it does today, only one major claim to notice. Until the Turkish conquest in the sixteenth century, the town, which translates into Latin as Alba Regia or Alba Civitas, played the ritual role in the coronation of kings of Hungary that Rheims did for the monarchs of France. In all "thirty-five kings [had] been crowned under . . . the Cathedral dome and sixteen are interred in its vault,"

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among which the artifact of worthiest note is "the sarcophagus of King Stephen I,"[48] Hungary's first Christian king and the founder of the Hungarian state. Incorporated into Stefan Virag's daguerreotype, beneath the floor, as it were, of the famous cathedral and as invisible as Stefan himself, a captive of matter like Stefan's failed "art," Stephen Dedalus, in his guise as the heir of the fantastic Leopold the First, thus has another double: a model of the historical figure he might have become, had he acted within the Hungarian myth, of which Bloom, unknowingly, offers him a version, which he misread as Griffith had, and worked to "forge the conscience of [his] race" through the institutions of a politically sovereign Irish state.

[1] E. Crankshaw, *The Hapsburgs: Portrait of a Dynasty* (New York: Viking, 1971), p. 14

[2] Don Gifford with Robert J. Seidman, *Notes for Joyce: An Annotation of James Joyce's* Ulysses (New York: Dutton, 1974), p. 483. On Bloom's Hungarian background, see esp. Robert Tracy, "Leopold Bloom Fourfold: A Hungarian-Hebraic-Hellenic-Hibernian Hero," *Massachusetts Review*, 6 (1965), 223–38; Dominic Manganiello, *Joyce's Politics* (London, Routledge, 1980), and Robert Martin Adams, *Surface and Symbol: The Consistency of James Joyce's* Ulysses (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962). All references to *Ulysses* are to the corrected text edited by Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Random House, 1986). Page numbers are cited parenthetically in the text.

[3] No doubt, in part because Bloom is ignorant of everything to do with the dynasty, and, in part, because, with the fall of the monarchy, the Hungarian aspect of Bloom's central European background is so much more prominent, readers of *Ulysses* have not focused on the specific role of the Hapsburg motif in the novel. On the one occasion when Bloom mentions "one of those Hapsburgs" (p.143) he appears, in fact, to be thinking of Otto I of Bavaria (Gifford and Seidman, *Notes for Joyce*, p. 146).

[4] First published in *The Pilot* (Boston), 6 Aug. 1887. It is included in P. Allt and R. K. Alspach, eds., *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), pp. 709–16.

[5] J. L. Hammond, *Gladstone and the Irish Nation* (London: Frank Cass, 1914), p. 387.

[6] *Hansard*, 3rd series, CCCIV, col. 1047.

[7] Arthur Griffith, *The Resurrection of Hungary: A Parallel for Ireland* (Dublin: James Duffy & Co., M. H. Gill & Son, Sealy, Bryers & Walker, 1904), p. 2.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 68.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 95–96.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89

[11] Padraic Colum, *Arthur Griffith* (Dublin: Brown and Nolan, 1959), p. 78.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 77.

[13] Manganiello, *Joyce's Politics*, p. 136.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 124.

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[15] James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, ed. Theodore Spencer (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 62.

[16] Manganiello, *Joyce's Politics*, pp. 131–32.

[17] Joyce, *Letters*, II, 167, quoted in Manganiello, *Joyce's Politics*, p. 127.

[18] Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, new and rev. ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. 1982), p. 389. An indication of how profoundly he had come to identify with the symbols of the regime is that much later, when he told the story of the glaucoma attack in Zurich on August 18, 1917, which led to his first eye operation, he should have recalled its coinciding with the birthday of the Emperor Franz Joseph (*ibid.*, p. 417).

[19] Padraic Colum, "A Portrait of James Joyce," *New Republic*, 31 May 1931, p. 347.

[20] Hugh Kenner, *Ulysses* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980), p. 133. Kenner suggests an empirical basis for the attribution. He reports that "Griffith was persistently rumoured to have a Jewish advertiser-ghostwriter."

[21] Robert Martin Adams, *Surface and Symbol: The Consistency of James Joyce's* Ulysses (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), p. 101. Adams argues that "Joyce has to . . . [an] extent sacrificed his character to his function in the fiction" (p. 103).

[22] Bernard Benstock, *James Joyce: The Undiscover'd Country* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1977), p. 77

[23] In a letter dated 7 Oct. 1921 to Harriet Weaver, Joyce described the extent of the changes this way: "*Eolus* is recast. *Hades* and the *Lotus-Eaters* much amplified and the other episodes retouched a good deal. Not much change has been made in the *Telemachia*" (*Letters*, I, 172, quoted in Michael Groden, *Ulysses in Progress* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977], p. 60).

[24] Colum, *Griffith*, p. 196.

[25] Tracy, "Leopold Bloom Fourfold," p. 227.

[26] Richard Madtes, *The "Ithaca" Chapter of Joyce's* Ulysses (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1983), p. 139.

[27] George Martin, *The Red Shirt and the Cross of Savoy: The Story of Italy's Risorgimento 1748–1871* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1969), p. 207. Florence, the capital of Tuscany, was ruled by a cadet branch of the Hapsburgs until 1860. The kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia was ruled as though it were an Austrian province until the loss of Lombardy in 1859.

[28] James Joyce, "Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages," in *The Critical Writings*, ed. Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking, 1964), p. 154.

[29] Laszlo Gefin, "Hungarian References in James Joyce's *Ulysses*," unpublished manuscript.

[30] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., XXVI, 320. Another of the town's distinctions was that Marcus Aurelius wrote the second book of his *Meditations* there. See the entry for Sabaria Savaria in N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard, eds., *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970).

[31] R. Stillwell, ed., *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Classical Sites* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), p. 232.

[32] Hugh Kenner, *Ulysses* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980), p. 109. Eleven, as Kenner has noted, is "Joyce's number of regeneration." In the Oxen of the Sun

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episode, for example, "eleven paragraphs . . . bring Bloom inside, holding his hat; eleven more, at the end of the episode conduct the noisy crew out of the hospital and into and out of the pub. . . ."

[33] Tracy, "Leopold Bloom Fourfold," p. 537.

[34] L. Cassels, *Clash of Generations: A Hapsburg Family Drama in the Nineteenth Century* (London: John Murray, 1971), pp. 194–208.

[35] George L. K. Morris, "Marie, Marie Hold On Tight," in C. B. Cox and Arnold P. Hinchcliffe, eds., *T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land: A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 165–67.

[36] Cassels, *Clash of Generations*, p. 210. The first version published was, in fact, the English edition under the title *My Past* in London in 1913. This was Eliot's source. The Emperor only accepted publication with this fait accompli.

[37] There is probably an allusion here to the contemporary state of Ireland as well. Malachi Mulligan's last name, that is, "a stew made by tramps from odds and ends of food" (*OED*), is also a kind of gulyas.

[38] Phillip F. Herring, ed., *Joyce's Notes and Early Drafts for* Ulysses: *Selections from the Buffalo Collection* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia, 1977), p. 225. In the draft designated as V.A. 19, Lipoti Virag's appearance in "Circe" is rendered as follows: "Litpold [sic] Virag, Bloom's double, wearing Stephen's hat, Buck Mulligan's primrose vest, and a brown mackintosh under which he holds a dulcimer [sic] a book in two tomes]. . . ."

[39] The novel has been identified as having been written by Amye Reade. Mary Power, "The Discovery of *Ruby*," *James Joyce Quarterly*, 18, No. 2 (Winter 1981), pp. 115–21.

[40] There might also be an allusion here to the Crown Prince Rudolf, who had been the pride of the Ringstrasse in Vienna.

[41] Gifford and Seidman, *Notes for Joyce*, p. 56.

[42] As Robert Tracy has pointed out, there is no "iron crown of St. Stephen" outside of Griffith's pages, and Joyce's duplication of the error is the surest evidence that he had *The Resurrection of Hungary* in mind when constructing this scene. Manganiello is mistaken in maintaining that there was an "iron crown" to discover that Tracy had not known about (*Joyce's Politics*, p. 242). The one Crown of St. Stephen is, as Tracy observed, not iron, but "a closed diadem of gold decorated with jewels and enameled icons" ("Leopold Bloom Fourfold," p. 532). The other parallels to which Tracy points between Griffith and Joyce are that both Franz Joseph and Bloom ride white horses, that they wear conspicuous green socks, that a foreign language is used at each coronation (Hungarian at Franz Joseph's and Hebrew at Bloom's), and that "Franz Josef is hailed by 'fifty-two working men from all the counties of Hungary' and Bloom is hailed by 'thirty-two working men from all the counties of Ireland' " (*ibid.*).

[43] *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, Centenary Ed., revised by Ivor H. Evans (New York: Harper, 1981), p. 1095. The connection with the Scottish Regalia is presumably the reason Gifford and Seidman identify the "ruby ring" with the coronation ring of Scotland (*Notes for Joyce*, p. 389). In the English coronation ceremonial, however, the coronation ring is the sovereign's personal property and there might be any number of ruby rings. The famous ruby ring to which they are referring found its way to the Hanoverians from the original owner Mary, Queen of Scots, and by way of the Stuarts, regnant and exiled,

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James II having "concealed it on his person when he fled the country in 1688." (Lord Twining, *European Regalia* [London: Batsford, 1967], pp. 267–68).

[44] D. G. Sheps of Concordia University has suggested in conversation that the choice of Bella Cohen for the role of *domitrix* might well reflect the punishing postwar confusion in Hungary following the fall of the Hapsburgs. The parodic allusion would be to the sudden visibility, under the short-lived Communist government of Bela Kun, of the contradictions endured by the earlier modus vivendi.

[45] C. H. Peake has, very acutely I think, described the status of the more extravagant occurrences in "Circe" as follows: The events express Joyce's "intuitions of the deeper mental levels of his characters, regardless of whether the materials used belong to the character's conscious mind." The material, in other words, depends on the psychologies of the characters only in the sense that the effects of stylistic imperatives such as "gigantism" and "embryonic development" do in "Cyclops" and "Oxen of the Sun." C. H. Peake, *James Joyce: The Citizen and the Artist* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1977), p. 269.

[46] Lord Twining, *European Regalia*, p. 266.

[47] James Joyce, "The Paris Notebook," in Robert Scholes and Richard M. Kain, eds., *The Workbook of Daedalus: James Joyce and the Raw Materials for* A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1965), p. 55. An indication that Joyce's reservations about the art of photography persisted is the pride of place Gertie MacDowell reserves for "the photograph of grandpapa Giltrap's lovely dog Garryowen" in the arrangement of her future home (p. 289).

[48] *Encyclopedia of Art* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), VII, 765.

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From Parallels to Paradise: The Lyrical Structure of Cheever's Fiction

Robert A. Morace

The literary life is full of myths, and among the most persistent is the one about John Cheever being a "disappointing novelist" whose "novels fly apart, shred, shed as if some wind of inattention had overtaken them."[1] Although reviewers and critics have complained that the novels are "fatally flawed," "broken backed," and "near structureless," and that "the novel *as a genre* is fundamentally inimical to Cheever's genius,"[2] the five novels in point of fact represent a rich transformation of the short-story form as Cheever practiced it, a form that he adapted to his own needs and purposes. Before going on to examine the structure of Cheever's fiction, including the relationship between the stories and the novels as well as between Cheever's distinctive narrative voice and his equally distinctive narrative form, it is necessary to consider briefly the reasons why the myth of "the disappointing novelist" has taken such a firm hold on the critical imagination, for only then can we begin to understand the need to reevaluate Cheever's fiction, the novels in particular, from a fresh point of view.

That Cheever made his name first as a writer of short stories, especially *New Yorker* stories, and that (when it was to his advantage) he spoke of the appropriateness of the story form—and the inappropriateness of the novel—to contemporary life are two reasons why his reputation as a novelist remains suspect. Far more important is his having been labeled, read, and written about as a "traditional writer." To call Cheever a traditionalist is to claim, rightly, that he upholds

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certain traditional social and moral values. Unfortunately, to invoke the epithet "traditionalist" is also to imply that his approach to the writing of fiction (both long and short) is similarly traditional and conservative, and this in turn allows the critic to judge Cheever's work—the novels in particular—according to certain reductive standards, or interpretive conventions, that do not necessarily apply to Cheever's kind of writing.

Although Cheever is not the closet postmodernist of Shady Hill, his approach to writing is less traditional and closed than it is innovative, open, even experimental (in the best sense of the word). As Walter Clemons briefly observed in his review of *Falconer*, "Long before Donald Barthelme, John Barth, and Thomas Pynchon began tinkering with narrative conventions Cheever had unobtrusively disrupted the expected shapes of fiction"[3]—so unobtrusively, in fact, that his disruptions, unlike those of the more overtly or programmatically postmodernist writers, went virtually unremarked despite the fact that to read Cheever's work chronologically straight through is to witness the development of a writer willing and able to experiment with fiction's multifarious shapes. While critics busied themselves devising Maginot lines for the short story and the novel (to keep them distinct from each other and from the postmodernist "fictions" that seemed to defy either definition or traditional critical interpretation), Cheever was explaining to John Hersey why the stories of that "innovator," Chekhov, were for a time misunderstood: they "seemed to have no endings but had instead a whole new inner structure."[4] In an age of fiction versus metafiction and of literary manifestos from the left (Federman, Sukenick, Barth) and the right (Gardner, Graff), Cheever was not only reading Bellow *and* Coover and liking both. He was, as well, quietly making a case for the two sides of fiction's coin, with the emphasis decidedly on the experimental: "Fiction is experimentation. . . . Every sentence is an innovation"; "You have to know what's been accomplished by other writers before you can know where you can proceed on your own."[5]

Cheever's critics seem well able to understand his view that the past is not an adequate refuge from the demands of the present age, yet at the same time they demand that he couch this view in the literary forms of the past that are no longer appropriate to his vision. Such critics bear more than a passing resemblance to the mother in Cheever's story "The Angel of the Bridge" who "longs for the vanishing and provincial world of her youth."[6] Cheever runs neither from nor to the past. Like that other Quincy man, Henry Adams, he too has been struck by the incongruities of modern life and the sharp differences between past and present, but like his own Coverly Wapshot, Cheever understands

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the timeless desire for reconciliation and the pressing need "to create or build some kind of bridge" between the two.[7]

In his fiction, bridges symbolize the missing and necessary link between the fragmented elements of the characters' chaotic lives and the wholeness for which they yearn. Cheever's bridge metaphor can also help us understand his distinctive narrative method and his own position in contemporary American literature as a writer at once traditional and innovative. Were Cheever a completely traditional writer, the narrative bridge he would most likely choose would be a causally related sequence of events: the linear plot associated with traditional fiction. Yet on the subject of plot, Cheever sounds distinctly conventional, sounds, in fact, a good deal like John Hawkes speaking against the "enemies of the novel." "I don't work with plots," Cheever has said; "I work with intuition, apprehension, dreams, concepts. Characters and events come simultaneously to me. Plot implies narrative and a lot of crap. It is a calculated attempt to hold the reader's interest at the sacrifice of moral conviction. . . ."[8]

The plotlessness of Cheever's novels, when not condemned out of hand, is usually and halfheartedly discussed as a reflection of the chaos of the modern age, a position that tends to transform Cheever into little more than a cultural seismograph and, as well, to sidestep the important question of exactly how Cheever's supposedly traditional fictions are structured if not by plot. John Gardner made a significant, albeit tentative, step in the right direction when, in his 1971 discussion of *Bullet Park*, he pointed to those techniques other than plot used by Cheever to unify his third novel: voice, "rhythm, imagistic repetition, echo. . . . [and] accretion of incidents."[9] More recently, George Hunt has applied Gardner's insight to all five of Cheever's novels and made a generally convincing defense of their formal integrity, noting that the novels develop according to a "poetic logic" governed by the author's "dialectical intelligence" and "Christian perspective." The novels are not, therefore, collections of short stories badly spliced together, as many of Cheever's critics have charged.[10] However, in making his case for the unity of the novels, Hunt fails to recognize that his unity derives from the same aesthetic principles that govern the stories. The relationship between the two constitutes Cheever's unique and innovative contribution to the history of both narrative forms. The novels are, in fact, expanded and, as R. G. Collins has briefly pointed out, *parallel* versions of the same narrative techniques that have largely gone unexamined, even unidentified, and that very clearly do not add up to the definition of the traditional short story that reviewers and

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critics seem to have in mind when they fault the novels for bearing the spoor of Cheever the short-story writer.[11]

The first point to be made concerning the structure of Cheever's stories is that while most of them are not as improvisational and devoid of plot as Cheever would like us to believe, neither is linear development of primary importance. This is evident even in Cheever's first published story, "Expelled" (1930), where the nonlinear structure has sometimes been misread as a sign of literary apprenticeship rather than understood as characteristic of Cheever's approach, both early and late, to the writing of fiction. The story's five sections—untitled introduction, "The Colonel," "Margaret Courtright," "Laura Driscoll," and "Five Months Later"—are not discrete sketches that never quite come together in the form of a single harmonious short story; rather, they constitute the planes and angular perceptions of an art that is, for all its comforting realism, very nearly cubist in effect. Many of Cheever's later stories, in particular the ones most often anthologized as short-story classics, do proceed in linear fashion, but the progress through time and the more or less straightforward plot of these stories is deceptive. "The Enormous Radio" (1947), "Torch Song" (1947), "O Youth and Beauty" (1953), and "The Swimmer" (1964), for example, are written in a prose equivalent of the device used in many folk ballads, incremental repetition. Essentially, Cheever plays the same scene or situation over and over with slight but cumulatively significant changes, gradually transforming the real into the fantastic, time into dream. This is obvious enough in the case of a story such as "The Swimmer," in which the parallelism is so insistent, the story's structure (and pace) very clearly following the order (and speed) of Neddy Merrill's pool-to-pool odyssey. In most of Cheever's stories and in all of his novels the parallelism is less insistent and, therefore, less obvious though no less integral to the individual work's effectiveness and to Cheever's art.

What Roman Jakobson has said of the structure of poetry applies equally well to the structure of Cheever's stories and novels: "In poetry similarity [metaphor] is imposed on contiguity [metonymic plot], and hence equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence."[12] It is precisely in those works in which the metaphoric parallelism is muted and therefore not self-consciously placed before the reader that Cheever's poetic technique has most often been misunderstood and judged as evidence of structural weakness, an aberration from the sequential plot which is the Aristotelian soul of conventional fiction. The Gertrude Flannery scene in "The Country Husband," for example, like the Gertrude Lockhart passage in *The*

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Wapshot Scandal, is not, as Lynne Waldeland has charged, disproportionate and without any thematic purpose;[13] rather, little Gertrude's situation as stray parallels the protagonist's, Francis', situation as "weed" in his suburban Garden of Eden. Similarly, the John Barth-like authorial intrusion near the end of "Boy of Rome" is entirely appropriate to Cheever's purpose in that both the homesick boy in Rome and the author-narrator in Ossining are exiles yearning for that elusive America of the soul where they hope to find relief from their "incurable loneliness." Each voice—the author's and the boy-narrator's—echoes and deepens the other, transforming the individual plaint into a song of universal longing.

This striving for the universal is by no means peculiar to Cheever's work; rather, it is, as the humanists like to say, the aim of all art. Nonetheless, it does point to a certain expansiveness that does distinguish Cheever's stories in so far as it is very much at odds with the compression of incident and tight narrative focus which are the hallmarks of the conventional short story. An assiduous observer of the unities Cheever is not, for in the space of just ten or fifteen pages, he will make use of a variety of geographical settings, an unusually large cast of characters, and/or a surprisingly lengthy period of time (weeks, months, even years, as in "Torch Song" and "The Children").

A relatively early work, "The Common Day" (1947) illustrates very well one phase of Cheever's expansive approach to fiction-writing. The story's spatial and temporal settings are quite specific: the New Hampshire countryside, a summer's day. The focus on character is much less precise. Although there is a central figure, Jim Brown, the story cannot be said to be about him in the same way "The Swimmer," for example, is about Neddy Merrill or Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" is about its protagonist. In fact, Cheever's Brown is not a protagonist in any usual sense because the focus of this story is not on any one character but, instead, on what all ten characters have in "common," their sense of geographical and psychological dislocation. A city dweller and the head of his own family, Jim feels uncomfortable and out of place while on a visit to the country estate of his mother-in-law, Mrs. Garrison, "the rightful owner of all he could see" (*SJC*, p. 22). So do the hired help—all of them foreign-born—over whom Mrs. Garrison appears to tyrannize. Jim's son, Timmy, finds himself neglected by the Irish nurse, Agnes Shay, who lavishes all her attention on four-year-old Carlotta, "her only link with the morning, with the sun, with everything beautiful and exciting" (*SJC*, p. 25).

This is not a story about the successful forging of "links," however,

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or about the ties that bind. Agnes is rebuffed by Carlotta who, seeking admission to the adult world of her grandmother, is in turn rebuffed by Mrs. Garrison, who for all her wealth and power feels no more at ease or at home than her granddaughter, her son-in-law, or her servants. These characters share the same physical space, the same common day, and the same sense of estrangement, yet what the reader feels most acutely is the vast emotional distance that separates each from the others. Jim longs to return to the safety of his home in the city; his wife, Ellen, on the other hand, yearns for a country place of her own, for only there, she believes, will she ever feel secure. In their case, the emotional distance appears ready to widen until it is as great as the gulf that separates the servants from their European homelands, Mrs. Garrison from her youth and from her dead husband, and Carlotta from the mother who, we are told, "had gone West to get a divorce that summer" (*SJC*, p. 24). The sense of separation and dislocation that plays an important thematic role in "The Common Day" and other Cheever fictions has an equally important bearing on the structural unity of these works, as will soon be made clear. Suffice it to say at this point that this unity depends considerably less on linear plot, narrative focus, and character development than it does on various forms of narrative parallelism: echoing, juxtaposition, counterpoint, incremental repetition, thematic variations, and the coming together of disparate characters, situations, and narrative lines.

Significantly, during the time Cheever was writing the novels his reviewers and critics have faulted for being too much like his stories, he was writing a collection of stories very nearly novelistic in effect (*The Housebreaker of Shady Hill*, 1958), and composing short fictions that were becoming more and more discontinuous: the comic opera narration of "The Day the Pig Fell in the Well" (1954); the multiple narratives of "The Trouble with Marcie Flint" (1957); the four parallel stories in "The Bella Lingua" (1958); the decidedly and ironically linear plot of "Montraldo" (1964), in which the order of events fails to yield any meaning other than the rule of chance in a discontinuous world; the free association technique of "The Jewels of the Cabots" (1972); and finally the rambling, indeed literally peripatetic, narrative of Cheever's most chaotic and perhaps most autobiographical story, "The President of the Argentine" (1976).

"The Day the Pig Fell in the Well" is especially noteworthy in that, appearing just three years before the publication of *The Wapshot Chronicle* in 1957, it is a literary hybrid, a short story that is, in fact, a compressed novel. Far more than "The Common Day," it illustrates

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Cheever's fondness for "incidental narrative" and "stretching of the conventional rules."[14]

> In the summer, when the Nudd family gathered at Whitebeach Camp in the Adirondacks, there was always a night when one of them would ask, "Remember the day the pig fell in the well?" Then, as if the opening note of a sextet had been sounded, the others would all rush in to take their familiar parts, like those families who sing Gilbert and Sullivan, and the recital would go on for an hour or more. The perfect days—and there had been hundreds of them—seemed to have passed into their consciousness without a memory, and they returned to this chronicle of small disasters as if it were the genesis of summer. (*SJC*, p. 219)

This opening paragraph is, like Cheever's title, a bit misleading, for the story told *by* the Nudds constitutes only a part of Cheever's story *of* the Nudds. Read in one way, the narrative of the day the pig fell in the well is nothing more than a plot contrivance, an excuse for telling a number of loosely connected anecdotes: "The summer the pig fell in the well was also Esther's tennis summer and the summer that she became so thin" (*SJC*, p. 220). Read another way, it serves as the central point from which the various "incidental," or parallel, narratives abruptly radiate and to which they eventually return, just as the Nudds return each summer to their "seasonal paradise" in the Adirondacks. Insofar as Cheever's story repeatedly folds back upon itself in the process of its telling, telescoping thirty or so summers into a vaguely defined past, "The Day the Pig Fell in the Well" cannot be said to develop along conventional lines, from conflict through climax to resolution. Instead of developing plot and character, Cheever deepens the mood and increases the emotional intensity, and herein lies the remarkable effectiveness not only of this particular story but of Cheever's fiction in general.

The story begins as comedy; there are slapstick accidents, absurdly funny misunderstandings, and a plot so wayward that even death—the pig's—evokes laughter. Then, almost imperceptibly, the mood begins to darken. A father's problems with his business partners, a daughter's divorce, a son's death—mere footnotes at first—gradually grow in importance until they nearly overwhelm the Nudds, whose cartoonish names suddenly seem so inappropriate to their roles in the domestic tragedy that Cheever's story has become. Against the economic and political vicissitudes of their world, Cheever posits the permanence of their "seasonal paradise." Similarly, against the tragic discontinuity of

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their lives, Cheever posits the comic discontinuity of the story of the day the pig fell in the well. More than a plot contrivance, a thin narrative thread, their "chronicle of small disasters" serves both as an alternative to the personal tragedies they have had to endure and as a substitute for a religious faith they no longer possess. Appropriately, it is Mrs. Nudd, who, as Cheever carefully points out, "had no more faith in the power of God than she had in the magic of the evening star" (*SJC*, p. 231), who invokes the power of fiction to dispel the tragic gloom that has settled over Whitebeach, speaking near the end of Cheever's story the same ritualistic invocation that had been heard at its beginning: "Remember the day the pig fell in the well?" (*SJC*, pp. 219, 235). Bereft of their place in the world of wars and depressions (both economic and psychological), "they all waited graciously for their turn" (*SJC*, p. 235), taking refuge and comfort in the communal telling of their tale.

It is not only the Nudds whom the story "restores" and "exhilarates," but the reader, too, who has perhaps been lulled into forgetting that Cheever's story is not single but double. So too is Cheever's ending. In the final sentence, Cheever takes back all that the preceding few paragraphs have restored: "The room with the people in it looked enduring and secure, although in the morning they would all be gone." The result is akin to what the post-structuralists like to call a self-canceling or self-deconstructing text that frustrates the reader-critic's efforts to extract any univocal meaning. As in so many of Cheever's works, the "meaning" of "The Day the Pig Fell in the Well" does not derive from the author's resolution of the dramatic conflict he has set in motion; it derives instead from the tension Cheever creates by pitting various parallel elements, including characters, scenes, and moods, against each other. "That late in the season, the light went quickly. It was sunny one minute and dark the next" (*SJC*, p. 234).

The characters in this and other Cheever fictions all face the same problem: how to live in a world that, in spite of all its middle-class comforts and assurances, suddenly appears inhospitable, even dangerous, a world that appears to be growing more and more incoherent and "preposterous" every day, one in which the "moral chain of being" has become a mere "thread" and where—as the audience for contemporary art, music, and fiction knows all too well—it is becoming increasingly difficult "to distinguish persiflage from profundity."[15] Cheever the author faces a similar problem: how to write about such a world in a way that will take account of the incoherence without succumbing to it. Cheever addresses the problem directly in the prologue to "The Death of Justina":

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> Fiction is art and art is the triumph over chaos (no less) and we can accomplish this only by the most vigilant exercise of choice, but in a world that changes more swiftly than we can perceive there is always the danger that our powers of selection will be mistaken and that the vision we serve will come to nothing. (*SJC*, p. 429)

The discontinuities of stories such as "The Death of Justina," "The Day the Pig Fell in the Well," and "The President of the Argentine" can, however, be traced to a more personal cause than that vague standby, the chaos of the modern era. When asked in an interview with John Hersey to explain, if he could, the "blurted quality" of his writings, Cheever attributed it to "some ungainliness in my spiritual person that I cannot master."[16] If *Falconer* and *Oh What a Paradise It Seems* come closer to satisfying the demands of his more traditional reviewers and critics, it is not because they are structured any differently than the stories, the Wapshot books, and *Bullet Park* (they are not), but because in them Cheever comes closer to mastering his sense of spiritual ungainliness. And the most palpable evidence of this mastery is to be found in the triumph of Cheever's narrative voice.

Cheever's distinctive narrative voice has already received considerable attention and has in fact been identified by a number of reviewers and critics as *the* unifying element in the fiction. We can, however, go further, for this voice, which seems to balance so effortlessly and yet precariously between the earthly and spiritual realms, between satire and celebration, detachment and compassion, irony and lyricism (its most salient feature), appears to have come into existence only as Cheever began to write *The Wapshot Chronicle*. (As late as 1953, reviewers of *The Enormous Radio and Other Stories* were still commenting on Cheever's "deliberately flat, controlled style."[17]) A careful reading of this novel suggests that he may have discovered his distinctive voice—and the need for it—in order to offset those images of quagmire, torn sky, and the American inferno that dominated his thinking in the 1950s and that continued to trouble him at least until the writing of *Falconer* in 1975. As Cheever confided in his journal as late as 1974, "that bridge of language, metaphor, anecdote and imagination that I build each morning to cross the incongruities in my life seems very frail indeed."[18] Even before he perfected his distinctive lyrical style as a frail bridge between discontinuous fact and harmonious vision, Cheever had often appended self-consciously lyrical passages to a number of his stories, including "The Country Husband": "Then it is dark; it is a night where kings in golden suits ride elephants over the mountains" (*SJC*, p. 346).

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Such passages attach themselves to Cheever's stories ambiguously, reflecting the author's own ambivalence concerning the validity of the transcendent vision that his lyricism implies. The lyrical endings soar above the confinements and frustrations of the protagonists' lives, yet the loftiness of the language and the seeming inappropriateness of the vision to the rest of the story make the lyricism suspect. Cheever seems both to affirm the vision and to mock it, as well as the author-character who would conjure it out of nothing but his own desire and imagination. This same ambivalence characterized Cheever the man—"Life for my father," Susan Cheever has noted, "was either unbearable or transcendent." It characterized Cheever the author, too. "In the later fiction," R. G. Collins has cogently argued, "Cheever seems to be suspended between a tragic pessimism and a raptured expectancy; he writes as an impaled victim believing that, somewhere near, there sounds unearthly salvation; he seems to be listening for the angels, as the earth smoulders beneath him."[19] Cheever did not wait for the angelic choir to begin its song; he chose instead to sing it himself, doing for his readers and himself what the girl does for the narrator in "The Angel of the Bridge": to sing them over the incongruities of their world and over the abyss of spiritual ungainliness and unfulfilled longing. I use the word "song" here in a literal as well as figurative sense, for the development of Cheever's lyrical style and his less guarded acceptance of the transcendent vision it implies necessitated the development of a less factually realistic and more nearly musical prose.

When, in the 1947 story "The Enormous Radio," Cheever referred to the machine's "mistaken sensitivity to discord" (*SJC*, p. 34), he was being doubly ironic. The radio's "sensitivity to discord" is mistaken from the point of view of the apartment dwellers who would prefer to hide their bickerings, anxieties, and abortions behind the facade of middle-class respectability. It is also mistaken from the point of view of Cheever's lyricism, the goal of which is not discord but concord and a special kind of "decorum." As Cheever learned from his *New Yorker* editor, Harold Ross, "Decorum is a mode of speech, as profound and connotative as any other, differing not in content but in syntax and imagery" (*SJC*, p. x). I have already noted that the structure of Cheever's fictions is based upon the use of parallel elements metaphorically juxtaposed on the basis of similarity rather than either causality or spatio-temporal contiguity. Cheever's sentences are similarly constructed and combined; for example, "There were no preliminaries this time. The seizure came with a rush. The strength went out of my legs, I gasped for breath, and felt the terrifying loss of

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sight" (*SJC*, pp. 495–96), where the structure is decidedly paratactic, and "How can a people who do not mean to understand death hope to understand life and who will sound the alarm?", which may look like prose but sounds like poetry:

> How can a people
> who do not mean to understand death
> hope to understand life
> and who will sound the alarm?

Partly elegiac, partly humorous, but always decorously balanced, the lyrical style enables Cheever to satirize his characters and at the same time to rise above the satire in order to read the often trivial signs of the times in terms of what they connote figuratively and spiritually rather than what they denote literally and socioeconomically.

Such a style is transitional in a double sense. It serves as the vital and necessary link between the seemingly separate yet interpenetrating realms of the literal/prosaic and the visionary/poetic, and it is a style that is itself in transition. Over the course of his career and especially during the period that his fiction became increasingly discontinuous, Cheever grew less concerned with providing factual information about the "practical world" (*SJC*, p. 337) and more concerned with evoking a lyrical mood.

The openings of the five novels provide dramatic evidence of this change. The first paragraph of *The Wapshot Chronicle* still closely follows the clipped, factual Hemingway-style of the early stories, though one may detect in the attempt to create an elegiac note the author's striving for something beyond the merely descriptive. The opening of *The Wapshot Scandal* moves away from fact and statement and toward myth and abstraction, as well as (in the doubling and tripling of nouns and verbs) a more musical effect. The movement away from factual description and toward a more insistent rhythmical parallelism in order to evoke a mode rather than to describe realistically a scene becomes more pronounced in *Bullet Park* and *Falconer* and culminates in *Oh What a Paradise It Seems*:

> This is a story to be read in an old house on a rainy night. The dogs are asleep and the saddle horses—Dombey and Trey—can be heard in their stalls across the dirt road beyond the orchard. The rain is gentle and needed but not needed with any desperation. The water tables are equitable, the river nearby is plentiful, the gardens and orchards—it is at a turning of the season—are irrigated ideally.[20]

We like to think that a novelist's words refer to the world

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transparently or, as in the case of the most programmatic postmodernists, that the words refer to themselves in a self-conscious and self-reflexive fashion. Cheever's prose does refer to the world; this is the reason he is so often and so mistakenly labeled a realist and a novelist of manners. It is also true, however, that from the early 1950s on, Cheever's prose style becomes progressively less "self-effacing" and more "self-apparent"—more real than its real-world referent.[21] Yet even in calling attention to itself, Cheever's prose avoids the hermeticism that characterizes many postmodernist fictions. Neither wholly referential nor wholly self-reflexive, this style and the visionary "world elsewhere" it evokes come to vie with and eventually to replenish our narrow definitions of both the novel and the world. "What I wanted to do," Cheever has his narrator say in "A Vision of the World," "was to grant my dreams, in so incoherent a world, their legitimacy" (*SJC*, p. 515), and to accomplish this Cheever had to devise for himself a language quite apart from the language of description and explanation, a language allied more to memory than to fact, a lyrically charged prose that would, like the best of Whitman's poetry, convince the reader on the basis of its own insistent, often incantatory rhythms rather than on the basis of either reason or realism, as in Whitman's "Do you not see O my brothers and sisters? It is not chaos or death—it is form, union, plan—it is eternal life—it is happiness" and Cheever's "Valor! Love! Virtue! Compassion! Splendor! Kindness! Wisdom! Beauty!" (*SJC*, p. 517). Cheever's ambivalence about this kind of "spiritual cheerleading" (as he calls it in *Bullet Park*) has already been noted. In *Falconer* and *Oh What a Paradise It Seems*, however, the lyricism achieves a cumulative power that enables both author and reader to overcome their modern skepticism and to accept a nearly mystical vision having no foundation other than Cheever's saying—or rather singing—that it is so.

Abstract and increasingly devoid of realism's "solidity of specification," his lyrical prose seems extraordinarily light, a graceful rising into that realm where, as Emerson explained in the "transparent eyeball" passage in *Nature*, the individual man merges with Universal Being and in this way discovers both his identity and his spiritual wholeness. Interestingly, it is not only a similar transcendental vision Cheever and Emerson share but the same essentially paratactic style that Hemingway and the early Cheever used to create a quite different effect. More evocative and resonant than descriptive, Cheever's prose moves toward pure song. Here again Cheever resembles Whitman, whose own deeply divided, "spiritually ungainly" personality caused him to yearn for and

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in his best work realize his Emersonian vision in a new poetic form in which sound is sense: "Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved voice."

It is significant that just as he began to work on *The Wapshot Chronicle* and, concurrently, to discover the need for and the possibilities of a lyrical style, Cheever also "developed a passion for Italian opera."[22] This passion manifests itself overtly in many of the stories and novels, including *Bullet Park*, in which the song of red-winged blackbirds "on one of the last clement days of the year" is compared to an "operatic reprise where the heroine, condemned to death, hears in the dark cell (Orrido Carcere) the lilting love music that was first sung at the beginning of Act II."[23] The operatic reprise is, of course, a form of the narrative parallelism that I have already identified as a distinctive feature of Cheever's writing. Equally striking is the similarity between operatic arias and those passages in Cheever's fiction that his critics have mistakenly labeled digressions but which are in fact integral parts of the essentially metaphoric—rather than metonymic—structure of his stories and novels. In them, a character (usually minor) appears, speaks his or her tale of woe (or has it narrated for him), and then exits. Often the speakers are not so much characters as disembodied voices that seem to come out of nowhere, are heard (or overheard), and then disappear. Cheever's use of this device, in embryo at least, antedates his interest in opera—the voices Irene Westcott hears in "The Enormous Radio," for example, or the wife's plaintive litany in "The Hartleys" (1949), which begins "'Why do we have to come back?'" and which ends, "'Why can't I do that, why can't I, why can't I, why can't I . . .'" (*SJC*, pp. 62–63).

In the later stories and in all of the novels, such aria-like passages appear more frequently and, in a sense, more obtrusively. Instead of facilitating the unfolding of the plot (as to a certain extent Mrs. Hartley's cri de coeur certainly does), they impede it. Read for their informational value and contribution to plot development—read that is as operatic recitatives—they are indeed digressive and therefore superfluous. Read as arias, however, they serve to deepen the mood of the story or novel, echoing and thereby universalizing the plight of Cheever's protagonists. The aria of the old man Honora meets aboard ship in *The Wapshot Scandal*, for example, sums up the pangs of guilt and loneliness and the loss of self-esteem suffered by virtually every one of the novel's characters, from Honora, Coverly, Betsey, Moses, Melissa, and Emile down to the IRS agent, Norman Johnson, the housewife-turned-suicide, Gertrude Lockhart, and the Jekyll-and-Hyde scientist,

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Dr. Cameron. These arias are not digressions from the main narrative; they are versions of it, crystallizations that freeze time, lyrical bridges connecting each of Cheever's lonely *isolatos* to all who share his plight.

That the building of bridges should be a major theme in *The Wapshot Chronicle* is entirely appropriate given that novel's incredible sprawl: the large cast of characters, the multiple settings (in time as well as space), and the numerous shifts in style, voice, and point of view. The extent of this sprawl is particularly obvious in the opening chapters. Cheever moves from Coverly and Moses to Mrs. Wapshot and the Women's Club to Leander and the *Topaze* to the prank that transforms the Independence Day parade into a comic debacle (chapter 1); then on to a history of the Wapshot family, including a long passage from Lorenzo Wapshot's journal concerning his father's return from Ceylon (chapter 2); then back to present time, to Mr. Pincher's comical love for his horse and to a panoramic view of St. Botolphs as the horse-drawn wagon carrying the members of the women's club makes its return trip (chapter 3); then to Rosalie Young—her loneliness, her day at the beach, and the automobile accident which thrusts her into the lives of the Wapshots (chapter 4); a description of the Wapshot house (chapter 5); a day in the eccentric life of cousin Honora (chapter 6).

What all this adds up to is not a novel "held together by spit and wire"[24] but instead a flaunting of various narrative conventions. Cheever's plot may be as wayward as the Independence Day parade, but the author's hold on his abundant materials is nonetheless firm, the waywardness deliberate in a narrative based on coincidence (in both its meanings) rather than causality. Instead of adventures, Cheever chronicles his characters' misadventures, their pratfalls and mistakes. Instead of developing plot and character, he juxtaposes opposites (male-female, past-present, humor-pathos), weaving together recurrent images of loneliness and loss and parallel scenes in which the characters feel themselves cut off, both geographically and emotionally, from parents, spouses, sons, from whatever they believe would allow them to feel less "ungainly," more esteemed.

Displaced from his wife's affection, from his sons, and from his relative eminence as captain of a barely seaworthy excursion ferry (itself a bridge of sorts), Leander begins to keep a journal in order to create a link between his past and his present, just as he subsequently writes letters to his sons in order to create a link between his present and his future. Leander's fears and yearnings appear in more compressed form in cousin Mildred's husband, Harry, who "doesn't come from anyplace really." He "doesn't have anything nice to remember and so he borrows

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other people's memories" along with their antiques (*WC*, pp. 119–20). For Leander's friend, Grimes, the void is not in the past but in the future, an unmarked grave in the Twilight Nursing Home's secret potter's field: "If I die in the night they'll dump me naked into a hole side by side with somebody I never knew. Go back and tell them, Leander. Tell them at the newspaper. You were always a good talker. Go back and tell them . . ." (*WC*, p. 202). That these scenes are at once comic and tragic further accentuates the discontinuities of Cheever's world and too the reader's experience of that world in the reading process itself.

Moses and Coverly have similar difficulty in "reading" their wives, whose personalities appear to be as divided and discontinuous as Cheever's tragicomic narrative. Yet, within the discontinuity, the reader discovers a surprising and certainly paradoxical continuity: the same situations, problems, and pairings (for example, Leander and Hamlet, Coverly and Moses) occur both within and between generations. Coverly's and Moses' misadventures beyond the seemingly safe confines of St. Botolphs parallel each other and reenact the similar travels of previous generations of Wapshot men, including Leander and his brother Hamlet. Cheever has structured his novel on the principle of recurrence rather than the Enlightenment notion of progress and its narrative equivalent, the orderly plot. The ending of such a novel must necessarily appear as an arbitrary closing off of a paradigmatic situation that could, like John Barth's "Frame Tale," continue ad infinitum. The birth of two new Wapshot males at the end of the novel ensures this recurrence.

These births, which one might expect to be the climax of Cheever's plot, the proof that Moses and Coverly have passed Honora's test, are rendered in a surprisingly anticlimactic way: "In the early summer both Betsey and Melissa had sons and Honora was as good or better than her word" (*WC*, p. 299). The births, merely noted, serve as a brief prelude to Leander's death, and it is death that brings forth the novel's most lyrical prose in this, Cheever's least lyrical novel:

> Outside he [Coverly] could hear the tossing noise of the trees, and the teakwood table in the hall—that famous barometer—made a creaking sound. Then, before the rain began, the old place appeared to be, not a lost way of life or one to be imitated, but a vision of life as hearty and fleeting as laughter and something like the terms by which he lived. (*WC*, p. 306)

To Coverly's vision, Cheever appends a second ending in which

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Leander rises from the dead (so to speak) to have on paper what he never had in life, "the last word."

As a more or less random list of seemingly discrete but nonetheless thematically and syntactically parallel items, Leander's "Advice to my sons" reflects in miniature the structure of the entire novel. It also recapitulates the change that occurs in Cheever's style, from the chiefly informational prose of the first three parts (*WC*, pp. 1–295) to the lyricism of the twelve-page conclusion. Thus, in the course of his "Advice" Leander turns away from the discontinuous facts of life (lines 1–16, dealing with drinking, eating, sleeping, sex, and so forth) and toward the more abstract articles of his faith: "'Fear tastes like a rusty knife and do not let her into your house. Courage tastes of blood. Stand up straight. Admire the world. Relish the love of a gentle woman. Trust in the Lord'" (*WC*, p. 307). The rhythm of Cheever's exclamatory sentences is far more intense in these four lines than in the previous sixteen, where the insertion of explanatory comments, such as "Hayseed," disrupts the rhythmical effects. If Leander's lyrical vision works, it does so on the strength of Cheever's language not his narrative logic, for there is little in the novel to support Leander's faith. Appealing to the reader's "capacity for wonder," the vision succeeds as (in F. Scott Fitzgerald's phrase) "a transitory enchanted moment," a magician's trick, as real as Prospero's island—and as ephemeral.

The Wapshot Scandal follows the same basic structural pattern as the *Chronicle*, including the use of a narrative frame (yet another form of parallelism). Similar as the two novels are, however, the *Scandal* is thematically a much darker work and stylistically much more lyrical. In the *Chronicle*, with its emphasis on youth, the refrain is "Why did the young want to go away?" In the *Scandal*, where the accidents are often as fatal as they are funny and where death and dying are less comic, more pervasive, the refrain is Coverly's Hamlet-like cry to Leander's ghost, "Oh Father, Father, why have you come back?" The ghosts of dead or absent fathers weave throughout the novel, linking the characters together in a forlorn brotherhood of the lost and the damned: Coverly and Moses, of course, but also Betsey, Melissa, Emile, Peter Cameron, Brunner, Mable Moulton, and Honora. In the *Chronicle*, travel is generally wayward but comic; in the *Scandal* it is a different matter altogether. No longer a rite of passage, travel is what Cheever's Sisyphean characters must do, condemned to searching desperately but ineffectually for the psychological and spiritual stability that the father represents, yearning (and invariably failing) to realize their great expectations.

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The loneliness and loss of self-esteem of the *Chronicle* still afflict Cheever's characters, but in the *Scandal* an even more dread dis-ease has taken hold: "Loneliness was one thing, and she [Melissa] knew herself how sweet it could make lights and company seem, but boredom was something else, and why, in this most prosperous and equitable world, should everyone seem so bored and disappointed?"[25] This deep division between material prosperity and inner emptiness may be psychological in effect and economic in origin, as Christopher Lasch has explained in *The Culture of Narcissism*, or it may be essentially a philosophical and religious matter, the self's being lost to itself, estranged from its being, as Walker Percy suggests in *Message in the Bottle* and *Lost in the Cosmos*. Either way, in *The Wapshot Scandal* the dis-ease reaches epidemic proportions, and only Coverly persists in searching out and perpetuating the frail line of moral order announced at the end of the *Chronicle*.

Cheever shares Coverly's affirmative vision as well as St. Botolphs' brand of decorum, which is "a guise or mode of hope" (*WS*, p. 5). He also shares, or at least entertains, Moses' cynical view of decorum's other side, the hypocrisy that masks the despair of the modern world, which Melissa has begun to feel so acutely. Thus the structure of the *Scandal* involves the use of parallel scenes, characters, and situations to create alternative visions, no one of which emerges clearly triumphant. In Cheever's paratactic novel, a position exists and, on equal terms, so does its opposite; neither is subordinate to the other. One hears something of Cheever, for example, in the old Senator, who speaks of "those simple ties that bind us to one another and to the gardens of the earth" (*WS*, p. 215), but Cheever manifests himself as well in Melissa's sudden awareness of "the force of guilt and lust within her own disposition" (*WS*, p. 231).

This doubleness of vision is not a new element in Cheever's fiction, but it is taken much further in the *Scandal* than in any of the earlier works. *If* the purpose of a novel is somehow to resolve the issues it dramatizes, then one may well agree with Scott Donaldson that

> despite its dark power, the novel is Cheever's least successful, being flawed by certain inconsistencies of character and tone: Dr. Cameron is sympathetic in one scene, despicable in the next; one is not sure the downfall of Gertrude Lockhart is to be taken comically or seriously . . . and St. Botolphs sometimes takes on an improbably rosy hue.[26]

Such inconsistencies are, however, far too numerous to be considered anything but an integral part of the novel's design and a

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major if subtle source of its "dark power," as in the following passages from the first and last chapters:

> The snowflakes shone like iron filings in the beam of his [old Mr. Jewett's] light, although there was nothing there to touch. The fall of snow exhilarated and refreshed him and drew him—full-souled it seemed—out of his carapace of worry and indigestion. (*WS*, p. 3)

> Christmas Day in the morning, when Coverly woke and romanced Betsey, was dazzling. The frost on the windowpanes, shaped like shrapnel, distilled and amplified the light. (*WS*, p. 303)

The descriptions combine celebration—"exhilarated," "refreshed," "full-souled," "romanced," "dazzling"—and menace—"like iron filings," "like shrapnel"—particularly in the latter passage, where there is no note of comedy ("indigestion") to blunt the effect of the juxtaposition. The collision of opposing images and moods becomes still more apparent—and more disconcerting—in the novel's concluding paragraph:

> Some time after midnight there is a thunderstorm and the last I see of the village is in the light of these explosions, knowing how harshly time will bear down on this ingenuous place. Lightning plays around the steeple of Christ Church, that symbol of our engulfing struggle with good and evil, and I repeat those words that were found in Leander's wallet after he drowned: "Let us consider that the soul of man is immortal, able to endure every sort of good and every sort of evil." A cavernous structure of sound, a sort of abyss in the stillness of the provincial night, opens along the whole length of heaven and the wooden roof under which I stand amplifies the noise of rain. I will never come back, and if I do there will be nothing left but the headstones to record what has happened; there will really be nothing at all. (*WS*, p. 309)

The conflict between affirmation and negation which underlies the entire novel begins in the opening paragraph where the word "nothing" is used in a more or less neutral sense and where the steeple of Christ Church is part of an interesting but not especially startling image. But by the end of *The Wapshot Scandal*, the conflict has become far more intense. Against the powerful acknowledgment of man's moral being and immortal soul, Cheever's skepticism resounds all too clearly in his "never . . . nothing . . . nothing," a sure echo of the waiter's meditation on nada/nothing in that bleakest of Hemingway stories, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." In the "cavernous structure of sound" that Cheever has so lyrically and painstakingly fashioned, the reader hears

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the author-narrator's last, Prospero-like words break the spell not only of fiction, with its suspension of disbelief, but of belief itself. Cheever repeats the same words in the same order until they become hollow-sounding echoes ("cavernous structures of sound"), leaving the reader, at best, in doubt and, at worst, with "nothing at all."

Taken further, Cheever's double vision inevitably leads to *Bullet Park*, a triumph of authorial duplicity and, one suspects, something of a dead end for a writer who hoped to find in the art of fiction some measure of relief from the dis-ease of spiritual ungainliness. *Bullet Park*/Bullet Park is alive with the sound of music: bird songs, nursery rhymes, hit tunes from Broadway musicals, and Chamber of Commerce jingles ("Bullet Park is growing, growing, Bullet Park is here to stay, Bullet Park shows great improvements every day in every way," [*BP*, p. 10]). The deliberately insipid, ironically superficial quality of the music is particularly noticeable in the novel's much discussed concluding sentence: "Tony went back to school on Monday and Nailles—drugged—went off to work and everything was as wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful as it had been" (*BP*, p. 245). The allusion to Lawrence Welk, the popular and thoroughly saccharine television bandleader for whom everything was "wonderful, wonderful," implies the self-conscious hollowness of Cheever's ending which is considerably closer to black humor than to either celebration or transcendence.

The hollowness of the music reflects the hollowness of Cheever's characters, as is comically yet painfully obvious in the ironic gap that exists between the high resale value of the houses in Bullet Park and the low esteem of their owners:

> Mr. Elmsford (6 bedrooms, 3 baths, $53,000) dusts his tarnished psalter which is something he never mastered and sings: "Hotchkiss, Yale, an indifferent marriage, three children and twenty-three years with the Universal Tuffa Corporation. Oh, why am I so disappointed," he says, "why does everything seem to have passed me by." (*BP*, p. 10)

Mr. Elmsford's lament is just one of the aria-like passages Cheever uses to universalize the plight of his main characters, Paul Hammer and Eliot Nailles. Mr. Wickwire, for example, "feels himself to be a hollow man ['a painful cavity'] but one who has only recently been eviscerated and who can recall what it felt like to have a skinful of lively lights" (*BP*, p. 7). Against the genial Lawrence Welk-like surface, Cheever posits sickness, old age, accidents, suicides, nursing homes, funeral parlors, cemeteries, ruined railroad stations, and abandoned miniature-golf

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courses in a novel in which the repetition of the words "cavernous" and "labyrinth" effectively underscores Cheever's point. What the director of a nursing home says of his patients applies equally well to all of the novel's characters: " 'They look like people and yet they're not' " (*BP*, p. 26). Nailles, Hammer, and the others are T. S. Eliot's Hollow Men gone suburban, headpieces filled not with straw but instead with the material comforts and bland assurances of upper-middle-class life. Empty and eviscerated, they also feel disoriented and displaced.

To his credit, Cheever makes the characters' disorientation the reader's as well. As John Gardner has pointed out, much of the negative response to *Bullet Park* can be attributed to the uneasiness reviewers experienced while reading a novel in which chance plays a major role. However, chance is only one manifestation of the novel's instability, which is as much structural as thematic. Technically, *Bullet Park* is narrated in the first person ("Paint me . . ." the novel begins), but Cheever's "I" quickly effaces himself, transformed into a third-person narrator who in turn dissolves into various centers of consciousness. Although severely restricted in time (a few months) and space (almost exclusively to Bullet Park), the novel's opening section (140 pages) is a narrative mare's nest, its confusing chronology a reflection of the life and mind of its focal character, Eliot Nailles. Part II is narrated in an entirely different though equally appropriate manner. Here the authorial narrator appears just once, and then only parenthetically, to introduce Paul Hammer's *written* account of his life and messianic mission. Compared to the Nailles section, Hammer's autobiography is at once brief (just seventy pages) and vast in scope (covering Hammer's lifetime and worldwide travels); it is also entirely linear in structure—disconcertingly so, for Hammer is clearly a madman whose calm, straightforward narrative puts Nailles's confusion into a new, less satirical perspective. Nailles and Hammer—reversing the names is one of the ways Cheever disrupts the reader's expectations—are not so much opposites as the oddly parallel halves of some missing whole that collide in the novel's brief (twenty pages) concluding section but never quite join together.[27]

Following the narrative method of Part I (using Nailles and Hammer as alternating centers of consciousness), Part III ends with the first-person narrator speaking in his third-person voice and from Nailles's point of view the "wonderful, wonderful" line quoted earlier. This ironic conclusion echoes both the end of Part I—"and everything was as wonderful as it had been" (*BP*, p. 142)—and the Swami Rutuola's "Love, Love, Love, Love, Love" chant (*BP*, p. 141) that had effected

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Tony's first resurrection from the land of the dead to a Bullet Park of the living dead, the drugged. The novel ends, therefore, not in hope (as does *The Wapshot Chronicle*), not in doubt (as does *The Wapshot Scandal*), but in mockery of the lyrical style and vision Cheever had hoped to affirm. However, although *Bullet Park* clearly reflects more of Moses' cynicism than of Coverly's faith, Cheever also seems to hold out the absurd possibility that even a debased lyricism ("wonderful, wonderful") contains within it the seed, or memory, of something finer. Similarly, the existence of a narrator, however effaced he may be, suggests the existence of some principle of order, some frail narrative and moral thread that may yet guide reader and writer alike out of the cavernous labyrinth.

Falconer has been called Cheever's "most fully realized novel,"[28] but the great power of this work derives not from any willingness on the author's part to follow certain novelistic conventions, such as linear plot, character development, and tonal consistency, but instead from a more concentrated use of narrative parallelism and the unironic affirmation of the lyrical vision he had "eviscerated" in *Bullet Park*. Although *Falconer* focuses on a single main character, Ezekiel Farragut, what Cheever emphasizes is less the individual character than what that character represents about man's plight and his future promise. Recent studies of the novel's step-by-step redemptive structure by Glen M. Johnson and myself are correct as far as they go,[29] but they should not be allowed to obscure the fact that Farragut's strivings are effectively dramatized only insofar as they are compared and contrasted with the similar but more limited longings of Farragut's wife, brother, jailers, and fellow prisoners (especially the Cuckold [*F*, pp. 110–17, 180–84]). Farragut's desires, addictions, vulnerability, self-pity, and confinement are shared by virtually all of the novel's characters as well as the novel's author. From the anonymous prisoner's "'I never got laid for free'" (*F*, p. 5) to Jody's "'I don't know why I took this job'" (*F*, p. 144), brother Eben's "'I've gone to extraordinary lengths to build up some understanding'" (*F*, p. 196), and the anonymous stranger's "'I been evicted because I'm a human being'" (*F*, p. 208), their biographical monologues and plaintive litanies echo Farragut's own, flowing together in the reader's mind into a chorus of pain and longing.

In *Falconer*, it is not only situations and character types that recur (and in their recurrence disrupt the narrative's progressive movement through time, in this way transforming and deepening the particular into the universal); it is the very words themselves. The words Marcia speaks to Farragut at the beginning of the novel are the words Carrie

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speaks to her husband, Farragut's brother, Eben, at the end: "'I don't have to listen to your shit anymore'" (*F*, pp. 25, 195). The guard Tiny's repeated question, "'Farragut, why is you an addict?'" (*F*, pp. 54, 62, 63), becomes Chicken's "'Why did you kill your brother, Zeke?'" (*F*, p. 190) and later Farragut's "'Eben, why do you live like this?'" (*F*, p. 197). As the novel progresses, the stylistic repetitions become gradually more concentrated and the prose more lyrically intense:

> What I'm trying to say [Chicken tells Farragut] is that I ain't learned all I know through experience. I ain't learned through experience at all. I like you and I don't like the Cuckold and it's that way all the way down the line and so I figure I must come into this life with the memories of some other life and so it stands that I'll be going into something else and you know what, Zeke, you know what, I can hardly wait to see what it's going to be like, I can hardly wait. I don't want to sound like one of those freaks who ain't got no class, one of those freaks who go around saying that since they have tasted death they got no fear, no fear at all. I got class. I mean like right now, right now if they were going to take me out before a firing squad, I'd go out laughing—I don't mean bitter laughing or broken-hearted laughing. I mean real laughing. I'd go out there and I'd dance my soft-shoe and with luck I'd have a good hard-on and then when they got the command to fire I'd throw my arms out so as not to waste any of their ammunition, so as to get the full benefit of their banging, and then I'd go down a very happy man because I'm intensely interested in what's going to happen next, I'm very interested in what's going to happen next. (*F*, p. 200)

The repetition of words and phrases in these long, sparsely punctuated, syntactically parallel sentences creates a cumulative, nearly liturgical intensity that also characterizes the monologue of the samaritan-like stranger who (like Chicken) befriends Farragut a few pages later.

> "I been evicted because I'm a human being, that's why. I make noises like a human being, I close doors, I cough sometimes in the night, I have friends in now and then, sometimes I sing, sometimes I whistle, sometimes I do yoga, and because I'm human and make a little noise, a little human noise going up and down the stairs, I'm being evicted. I'm a disturber of the peace." (*F*, pp. 208–09)

What distinguishes these passages from many of the plaintive arias in the earlier novels and stories is the general absence of any bitterness on the speaker's part and of any irony on the author's. It is as if both character and author have overcome their "mistaken sensitivity to-

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discord," substituting for it that human inclination toward light, toward "spiritual light" which, Cheever has claimed, "is very nearly botanical."[30] This spiritual phototropism has always been present in Cheever's work, but in *Falconer* it may be said to form the basic underlying plot, drawing Farragut and the reader slowly but steadily out of the prison house of darkness and self-pity and toward that luminous still point—"Rejoice, he thought, rejoice"—with which the novel ends and Farragut's new life begins. As he makes his escape, carried out of the prison at night and in a pauper's coffin, Farragut suddenly realizes, "How strange to be carried so late in life and towards nothing that he truly knew, freed, it seemed, from his erotic crudeness, his facile scorn and chagrined laugh—not a fact, but a chance, something like the afternoon light on high trees, quite useless and thrilling" (*F*, pp. 203–04). Cheever's lyricism is similarly "useless and thrilling." On the strength of language, Cheever makes a leap of faith and imagination, carrying the reader beyond fact and reason (Farragut has significantly left his Descartes behind) to a world elsewhere, a fictive reality, where one is able to evoke and unironically affirm in the face of the Melvillean "blackness of darkness" an Emersonian vision of "afternoon light on high trees."

The same lyrical style and vision informs *Oh What a Paradise It Seems*, a work that many reviewers have misread as the long-awaited proof "that our best short story writer has consummately mastered the somewhat different craft of writing novels."[31] Although readers, or at least reviewers, tend to experience the novella as being chiefly about Lemuel Sears, in point of fact only five of the eleven chapters are devoted to Sears in their entirety (1, 2, 5, 7, 8), while two others (4 and 11) deal with Sears only in part and another (10) concerns Sears and another character, Horace Chisholm, together. To compound matters, Sears's story, unlike Farragut's, is double: one narrative line traces his efforts to save Beasley's Pond from contamination while the other concerns the slapstick erotics of his relationship with Renee Herndon and later an elevator operator named Eduardo. Chapters 3, 4, 6, 9, and parts of 10 and 11 comprise a parallel plot, or actually two parallel plots—one involving Chisholm, the lonely environmentalist whom Sears has hired to help save the pond, and Betsy Logan, who admires Chisholm for rescuing her baby and (consequently) for trying to save Beasley's Pond.

Clearly, if this is Sears's story, then it is his story told in the Wapshot manner, with one very important difference. In the Wapshot books the various narrative lines radiate out from a common center, St. Botolphs,

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and except for the Independence Day and Christmas frames imposed on these novels, the lines neither return to this center nor for the most part even cross one another. In *Oh What a Paradise*, the narrative lines do cross paths (without colliding, as they do in *Bullet Park*), drawn together on the basis of thematic parallels and verbal and imagistic echoes to form a nearly seamless whole in which Cheever weaves together two contrasting sets of motifs: netherness, portability, pollution, nomadism, and spiritual vagrancy on the one hand, and music, water, home, memory, and various paradises (pond, trout stream, supermarket, Renee Herndon) on the other. However different their outward lives may be, Sears, Chisholm, and Betsy are linked by these motifs and by the spiritual unrest and yearning they signify—so much so that what Cheever writes of Chisholm applies equally well to Sears and (with a change in pronouns) to Betsy as well:

> He seemed to be searching for the memory of some place, some evidence of the fact that he had once been able to put himself into a supremely creative touch with his world and his kind. He longed for this as if it were some country which he had been forced to leave. (*O*, p. 76)

Nowhere in Cheever's fiction is the appeal to memory quite so strong as in *Oh What a Paradise*, where it connects not only present and past but self and other, world and spirit. Remembering his first wife, "the sainted Amelia," Sears recalls he felt

> that he had known her in some other life and he would never have any occasion to question the authority of this sensation of familiarity. When she lay dying in his arms, twenty years later, his grief was unassuageable but there was a sense that she was returning to some stratum of existence where they first met and where they would meet again. (*O*, p. 55)

Memory—in this case of Amelia and of "some other life"—serves as a connecting link, evidence of the continuity that Cheever struggled to affirm throughout his career and here translates into the very language of his novella. On the one hand, Cheever acknowledges the discontinuous facts of a contaminated world:

> On and on went Chisholm's recitation of poisons. Polychlorinated biphenyls. Dioxin. Chloroform. Thoroviven. Clorestemy, Mustin and Thraxon. As they moved from the wetlands to the charming brook he recited the diseases these chemicals produced in men. Rickets. Blindness. Brain tumor. Impotence. Sterility. And these were all more desirable than what happened to the woman in Mitcheville who miscarried a child that looked more like a dog than a human.

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But against these Cheever posits the continuity of a differently balanced, more rhythmically flowing prose that in effect creates its own dreamlike reality:

> The wetlands drained into a stream that had for Sears the appearance of a traditional trout brook. It flowed over stones—glacial rubble—it formed deep pools, its breadth was variable, one could not quite anticipate its variety as it followed gravity through the woods to some destination of its own. The illusion of eternal purity the stream possessed, its music and the greenery of its banks, reminded Sears of pictures he had seen of paradise. The sacred grove was no legitimate part of his thinking, but the whiteness of falling water, the variety of its sounds, the serenity of the pools he saw corresponded to a memory as deep as any he possessed. (*O*, p. 84–85)

"Isn't it true that we enjoy on skates a sense of fleetness that seems to be a primordial memory?" (*O*, p. 91), asks Sears in a letter to a local newspaper, a letter that is at once affecting and (as Sears later realizes) ridiculous. And isn't it also true that Cheever's lyrical style is an attempt to evoke this same "primordial memory," an attempt that is equally affecting and equally ridiculous in a world where men are condemned to the solitude of longing and to the "unassuageable" pain of spiritual ungainliness? Cheever's modern-day Gulliver, Lemuel Sears, eventually discovers "some sameness in the search for love and the search for potable water" (*O*, p. 99), a sameness that can be affirmed but that cannot be maintained outside the fiction. Thus, Cheever traces Farragut's confinement (which is presented as a fact) but not his freedom (which is a possibility, a fantasy). And at the very end of *Oh What a Paradise*, Cheever once again breaks the spell he has cast, lyrically reminding the reader of the unreality of his creation: "and as I said at the beginning, this is just a story to be read in bed in an old house on a rainy night" (*O*, p. 100).

If fiction was for Cheever what poetry was for Frost, "a momentary stay against confusion," then it seems clear that after Farragut's—and Cheever's—"triumph" at the end of *Falconer*, *Oh What a Paradise* represents something of a "strategic retreat," a heady and wholly convincing vision of the world as paradise and of life "as an exquisite privilege" (*O*, p. 100) that the dying Cheever openly acknowledged as a trick of the hopeful imagination, as "just a story." The ending of this novella leaves the reader exactly where he finds himself at the end of so many of Cheever's fictions: back at the beginning. However, the effect here and in *Falconer* is not one of futility; the rain that falls on the first

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and last pages "is gentle and needed but not needed with any desperation" (*O*, p. 3). Precisely this serenity distinguishes *Falconer* and *Oh What a Paradise* from the earlier novels, which are invariably if lightly tinged with a coloring of naturalistic doom. The Wapshots, Hammer, and Nailles seem little able or perhaps little willing to direct their wayward lives; they seem so much in the grip of malign forces beyond their control. In the later novels, Cheever places much more emphasis on his characters' ability to shape their own destiny. Thus the narrative frame of *Oh What a Paradise* suggests not closure but instead the ongoingness of the redemptive struggle to build a bridge across the abyss of spiritual ungainliness. Along with the earlier novels and stories, *Oh What a Paradise* reflects in its lyrical style and its parallel structure, as well as its contemporary subject matter, Cheever's feeling that wholeness of being is no longer apparent, that, rather, it is something author, character, and reader must strive to attain, imaginatively re-membering, bridging, seeking out the missing links, the unconventional connections.

[1] Elizabeth Hardwick, "Cheever, or the Ambiguities," *New York Review of Books*, 31 (20 Dec. 1984), 6.

[2] Hilary Corke, rev. of *The Wapshot Scandal*, *New Republic*, 25 Jan. 1964, p. 19; Benjamin DeMott, rev. of *Bullet Park*, *New York Times Book Review*, 27 Apr. 1969, pp. 1, 40; Joyce Carol Oates, rev. of *Falconer*, *Ontario Review*, 7 (Fall/Winter 1977), 99–101; Adam Gussow, "Cheever's Failed Paradise: The Short Story Stylist as Novelist," *Literary Review*, 27 (Fall 1983), 111.

[3] Walter Clemons, "Cheever's Triumph," *Newsweek*, 14 Mar. 1977, p. 62.

[4] John Hersey, "Talk with John Cheever," *New York Times Book Review*, 6 Mar. 1977, p. 25.

[5] Annette Grant, "The Art of Fiction," *Paris Review*, 17 (Fall 1976), 55; Christina Robb, "Cheever's Story," *Boston Globe Magazine*, 6 July 1980, p. 31.

[6] *The Stories of John Cheever* (New York: Knopf, 1978), p. 490. Hereafter cited as *SJC*.

[7] John Cheever, *The Wapshot Chronicle* (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 118. Hereafter cited as *WC*.

[8] Grant, "The Art of Fiction," p. 51.

[9] John Gardner, "Witchcraft in Bullet Park," *New York Times Book Review*, 24 Oct. 1971, pp. 2, 24.

[10] George W. Hunt, *John Cheever: The Hobgoblin Company of Love* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1983). Hunt also and very ably discusses Cheever's lyrical style but does not consider its gradual evolution or specific character, only its sudden appearance and similarity to the styles of Yeats, Auden, and others.

[11] R. G. Collins, "Introduction," *Critical Essays on John Cheever*, ed. R. G. Collins (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982), p. 9. Another critic who has commented briefly but intelligently on Cheever's narrative technique is Samuel Coale: "Each

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episode in a Cheever book can be seen as an emblem of the entire theme and vision of the book. . . . His plots are not so much incremental as spasmodic . . ." ("Cheever and Hawthorne: The American Romancer's Art," Collins, ed., *Critical Essays*, pp. 193–209). In an essay entitled "Fugitive Time: Dissolving Experience in the Later Fiction of Cheever," *Studies in American Fiction*, 12 (Autumn 1984), 175–88, Collins points out that "Coale's view of modern experience as spasmodic calls for a form of narrative continuity other than cause and effect." Coale, Collins, Gardner, and Hunt have proven to be the most perceptive and the most suggestive of Cheever's critics.

[12] Roman Jakobson, "Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry," *Lingua*, 21 (1968), 602.

[13] Lynne Waldeland, *John Cheever* (Boston: Twayne, 1979), pp. 74–75.

[14] Susan Cheever, *Home before Dark* (Boston: Houghton, 1984), p. 196.

[15] "Preposterous," "moral chain of being," and "thread": *SJC*, pp. 429, x, 345; "to distinguish persiflage from profundity": John Cheever, "The President of the Argentine," *Atlantic Monthly*, 237 (April 1976), 43–45.

[16] Hersey, "Talk with John Cheever," p. 25.

[17] Penelope Houston, *Spectator*, 191 (20 Nov. 1953), 609–10.

[18] Susan Cheever, *Home before Dark*, p. 199.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 87; Collins, "Fugitive Time," p. 175.

[20] John Cheever, *Oh What a Paradise It Seems* (New York: Knopf, 1982), p. 3. Hereafter cited as *O*.

[21] For a discussion of the terminology, see Jerome Klinkowitz, *The Self-Apparent Word: Fiction as Language / Language as Fiction* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1984). Beatrice Greene, in her "Icarus at St. Botolphs: A Descent to 'Unwonted Otherness,'" *Style*, 5 (1971), 119–37, was the first to note the way in which Cheever conjures a world out of language alone.

[22] Susan Cheever, *Home before Dark*, p. 106.

[23] John Cheever, *Bullet Park* (New York: Knopf, 1969), p. 89. Hereafter cited as *BP*.

[24] Carlos Baker, rev. of *The Wapshot Chronicle*, *Saturday Review*, 23 Mar. 1957, p. 14.

[25] John Cheever, *The Wapshot Scandal* (New York: Harper, 1964), p. 50. Hereafter cited as *WS*.

[26] Scott Donaldson, "John Cheever," *American Writers: A Collection of Literary Biographies*, ed. Leonard Ungar (New York: Scribner's, 1979), p. 184.

[27] To cite but one instance out of many: in Part I Nailles thinks (to himself) that allowing his old, ailing mother to die would be an act of mercy. When in Part III Hammer suggests that Nailles should put his old, ailing dog Tessie out of its misery, Nailles considers the idea monstrous.

[28] Samuel Coale, *John Cheever* (New York: Ungar, 1977), p. 113. John Cheever, *Falconer* (New York: Knopf, 1977); hereafter cited as *F*.

[29] Glen M. Johnson, "The Moral Structure of Cheever's *Falconer*," *Studies in American Fiction*, 9 (Spring 1981), 21–32; Robert A. Morace, "The Religious Experience and the 'Mystery of Imprisonment' in *Falconer*," *Cithara*, 20 (Nov. 1980), 44–53.

[30] Hersey, "Talk with John Cheever," p. 28.

[31] Joshua Gilder, rev. of *Oh What a Paradise It Seems*, *Saturday Review*, Mar. 1982, p. 17.

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INDEX TO

Twentieth Century Literature

VOLUMES 31–35
1985–1989

Compiled by
HELEN BAJAN

Adair, William, "*For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Magic Mountain*: Hemingway's Debt to Thomas Mann," 429–44
Adam, Peter, "Alexandria Revisited," 33 (1987), 395–410
Adams, Stephen J., " 'The Noisiest Novel Ever Written: Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*," 35 (1989), 43–64
Ahearn, Barry, "Williams and H. D., or Sour Grapes," 35 (1989), 299–309
Ahearn, Kerry, "Family and Adultery: Images and Ideas in Updike's Rabbit Novels," 34 (1989), 62–83
Airaudi, Jesse T., "Eliot, Milosz, and the Enduring Modernist Protest," 34 (1988), 453–67
Aldington, Richard, *see* Zilboorg, Caroline
Amis, Kingsley, *see* Hague, Angela
Ammons, A. R., *see* Reiman, Donald H.
Andreach, Robert J., "Tally's *Terra Nova*: From Historical Journals to Existential Journey," 35 (1989), 65–73
Andrews, Elmer, "The Gift and the Craft: An Approach to the Poetry of Seamus Heaney," 31 (1985), 368–79
Arlett, Robert, "The Dialectical Epic: Brecht and Lessing," 33 (1987), 67–79
Armstrong, Paul B., "Conrad's Contradictory Politics: The Ontology of Society in *Nostromo*," 31 (1985), 1–21
Ashbery, John, *see* Edelman, Lee
Auden, W. H., *see* Conniff, Brian
Austen, Jane, *see* Keener, Frederick M.
Axelrod, Steven Gould, "Robert Lowell and Hopkins," 31 (1985), 55–72
Ayckbourn, Alan, *see* Dukore, Bernard F. (1986)

Barnes, Peter, *see* Dukore, Bernard F. (1987)
Barrett, Eileen, "Matriarchal Myth on a Patriarchal Stage: Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*," 33 (1987), 18–37
Barry, Nancy K., "The Fading Beautiful Thing of *Paterson*," 35 (1989), 343–63
Barth, John, *see* Roemer, Marjorie Godlin
Bar-yaacov, Lois, "The Odd Couple: The Correspondence between Marianne Moore and Ezra Pound, 1918–1939," 34 (1988), 507–27
Bassoff, Bruce, "Oedipal Fantasy and Arrested Development in *The Good Soldier*," 34 (1988), 40–47
Beams, David W., "The Fortunate Fall: Three Actions in *The Bell*," 34 (1988), 416–33

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Bell, Elizabeth S., "Call Forth a Good Day: The Nonfiction of Kay Boyle," 34 (1988), 384–91
Benstock, Berni, "The £S.d. of *Dubliners*," 34 (1988), 191–210
Berry, Eleanor, "William Carlos Williams' Triadic-Line Verse: An Analysis of Its Prosody," 35 (1989), 364–88
Bishop, E. L., "The Shaping of *Jacob's Room*: Woolf's Manuscript Revisions," 32 (1986), 115–35
Borges, Jorge Luis, *see* Simpkins, Scott
Bowen, Roger, " 'The Artist at His Papers': Durrell, Egypt, and the Poetry of Exile," 33 (1987), 465–84
Bowles, Paul, *see* Special Issue, 32 (Fall/Winter 1986)
Boyle, Kay, *see* Special Issue, 32 (Fall 1988); MacNiven, Ian S. (1988)
_____. "On the Run (1929)," 34 (1988), 258–60
_____. "Why Are We Here? (1988)," 34 (1988), 261–62
_____. "Books by Kay Boyle" [A Selected Bibliography], 34 (1988), 392–94
Brecht, Bertolt, *see* Arlett, Robert
Brelet, Claudine, "Interview with Lawrence Durrell," 33 (1987), 367–81
Bremen, Brian A., " 'The Radiant Gist': 'The Poetry Hidden in the Prose' of Williams' *Paterson*," 32 (1986), 221–41
Brownstein, Marilyn L., "Postmodern Language and the Perpetuation of Desire," 31 (1985), 73–88
Butscher, Edward, "Introduction," 32 (1986), 255–66
_____. "Paul Bowles as Poet: Excursions of a Minimal Anti-self," 32 (1986), 350–72
Buzard, James Michael, "Forster's Trespasses: Tourism and Cultural Politics," 34 (1988), 155–79

Carpentier, Martha C., "Orestes in the Drawing Room: Aeschylean Parallels in T. S. Eliot's 'The Family Reunion,' " 35 (1989), 17–42
Chadwick, Joseph, "Family Romance as National Allegory in Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and *The Dreaming of the Bones*," 32 (1986) 155–68
Cheadle, Mary P., "The Vision of Light in Ezra Pound's *The Unwobbling Pivot*," 35 (1989), 113–30
Cheever, John, *see* Morace, Robert A.; Stengel, Wayne
Clark, Suzanne, "Revolution, the Woman, and the Word: Kay Boyle," 34 (1988), 322–33
Comnes, Gregory, "Fragments of Redemption: Reading William Gaddis' *JR*," 35 (1989), 161–82
Conniff, Brian, "The Modern Lyric and Prospero's Island," 34 (1988), 84–112
Conrad, Bryce, "Engendering History: The Sexual Structure of William Carlos Williams' *In the American Grain*," 35 (1989), 254–78
Conrad, Joseph, *see* Armstrong, Paul B.
Cooley, Mason, "The Sexual Politics of Narcissism," 32 (1986), 40–49
Crane, John K., "But the Days Grow Short: A Reinterpretation of Faulkner's 'Dry September,' " 31 (1985), 410–20

Dasenbrock, Reed Way, "Lawrence Durrell and the Modes of Modernism," 33 (1987), 515–27
Degnan, James P., "The Encounter in Joyce's 'The Encounter,' " 35 (1989), 89–93
Dick, Susan, " 'What fools we were!': Virginia Woolf's 'A Society,' " 33 (1987), 51–66
Dickson, Gregory, "Setting and Character in *The Revolt of Aphrodite*," 33 (1987), 528–35

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Ditsky, John, "*The Time of Friendship*: The Short Fiction of Paul Bowles," 32 (1986), 373–87
Dixon, Roslyn, "Reflecting Vision in *The House of Mirth*," 33 (1987), 211–22
Doolittle, Hilda, *see* H. D.
Doreski, William, "Robert Frost's 'The Census-Taker' and the Problems of Wilderness," 34 (1988), 30–39
Dos Passos, John, *see* Fichtelberg, Joseph
Drabble, Margaret (interview), *see* Hannay, John
Dukore, Bernard F., "Craft, Character, Comedy: Ayckbourn's *Woman in Mind*," 32 (1986), 23–39
_____. "The Author's Play: From *Red Noses, Black Death* to *Red Noses*," 33 (1987), 159–78
Durrell, Lawrence, *see* Special Issues, 33 (Fall and Winter 1987)
_____. "Letters to T. S. Eliot," 33 (1987), 348–58
_____. "Letters to Henry Miller," 33 (1987), 359–66
_____. "Lawrence Durrell and John Hawkes: Passages from a Dialogue," 33 (1987), 411–15
_____. "*Provence Entire?*," 33 (1987), 416–30
Dyer, Gary R., "Humbert Humbert's Use of Catullus 58 in *Lolita*," 34 (1988), 1–15

Edelman, Lee, "The Pose of Imposture: Ashbery's 'Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,'" 32 (1986), 95–114
Eliot, T. S., *see* Airaudi, Jesse T.; Carpentier, Martha C.; Fredman, Stephen; Furbank, P. N.; Johnson, Loretta; Koestenbaum, Wayne; Leavell, Linda; Surette, Leon
Eliot, Vivien, *see* Johnson, Loretta
Escher, M. C., *see* Heusel, Barbara Stevens

Faulkner, William, *see* Crane, John K.
Fichtelberg, Joseph, "The Picaros of John Dos Passos," 34 (1988), 434–52
Ford, Ford Madox, *see* Bassoff, Bruce
Forster, E. M., *see* Special Issue, 31 (Summer/Fall 1985); Buzard, James Michael; Kaplan, Carola M.
Franciosi, Robert, "Introduction," 35 (1989), 233–34
Fredman, Stephen, "Williams, Eliot, and American Tradition," 35 (1989), 235–53
Fried, Debra, "Andromeda Unbound: Gender and Genre in Millay's Sonnets," 32 (1986), 1–22
Frost, Robert, *see* Doreski, William
Furbank, P. N., "Forster, Eliot, and the Literary Life," 31 (1985), 170–79

Gaddis, William, *see* Comnes, Gregory
Galef, David, "The Self-Annihilating Artists of *Pale Fire*," 31 (1985), 421–37
García Márquez, Gabriel, *see* Simpkins, Scott
Gardner, Philip, "'One Fraction of a Summer Field': Forster and A. E. Housman," 31 (1985), 161–69
Ghose, Zulfikar (interview), *see* Kanaganayakam, C.
Gillette, Jane Brown, "'Oh, What a Something Web We Weave': The Novels of Elizabeth Taylor," 35 (1989), 94–112
Gilroy, James P., "Food, Cooking, and Eating in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*," 33 (1987), 98–109

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Godshalk, William L., "*Sebastian: or, Ruling Passions*: Searches and Failures," 33 (1987), 536–49
Gordon, Jan B., "The Third Cheer: 'Voice' in Forster," 32 (1985), 315–28
Graves, Robert, *see* Grennen, Joseph E.
Greene, Graham, *see* Hynes, Joseph
Grennen, Joseph E., "Robert Graves's Poem 'O': Wresting Meaning from the Alphabet," 33 (1987), 150–58
Griffith, Arthur, *see* Ungar, Andras P.
Grogan, Ruth A., "Tomlinson, Ruskin, and Moore: Facts and Fir Trees," 35 (1989), 183–94
Guerinot, J. V., "The Pleasures of Rose Macaulay," 33 (1987), 110–28

H. D., *see* Ahearn, Barry; Sword, Helen
Hague, Angela, "Picaresque Structure and the Angry Young Novel," 32 (1986), 209–20
Halls, Michael, "The Forster Collection at King's: A Survey," 31 (1985), 147–60
Hamovitch, Mitzi Berger, "Release from Torment: The Fragmented Double in *Let It Come Down*," 32 (1986), 440–50
Hannay, John, "Margaret Drabble: An Interview," 33 (1987), 129–49
Hart, Henry, "Seamus Heaney's Poetry of Meditation: *Door into the Dark*," 33 (1987), 1–17
_____. "Poetymologies in Seamus Heaney's *Wintering Out*," 35 (1989), 204–31
Hatlen, Burton, "Sexual Politics in Kay Boyle's *Death of a Man*," 34 (1988), 347–62
Heaney, Seamus, *see* Andrews, Elmer; Hart, Henry
Hemingway, Ernest, *see* Adair, William; Meyers, Jeffrey
Herz, Judith Scherer, "The Remaking of the Past in Forster's Non-Fiction," 31 (1985), 287–96
Heusel, Barbara Stevens, "Joyce and the Drama of Cognition: Escher as a Visual Analogue," 34 (1988), 395–406
Hill, Geoffrey, *see* Lloyd, David
Hite, Molly, "Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* and *The Four-Gated City*: Ideology, Coherence, and Possibility," 34 (1988), 16–29
Hopkins, Gerard Manley, *see* Axelrod, Steven Gould
Housman, A. E., *see* Gardner, Philip
Hoy, Pat C., II, "The Narrow, Rich Staircase in Forster's *Howards End*," 31 (1985), 221–35
Hughes, Ted, *see* Scigaj, Leonard M.
Hulcoop, John F., "Percival and the Porpoise: Woolf's Heroic Themes in *The Waves*," 34 (1988), 468–88
Hynes, Joseph, "Two Affairs Revisited," 33 (1987), 234–53

Ives, Charles, *see* Johnston, Walter E.

Janik, Del Ivan, "History and the 'Here and Now': The Novels of Graham Swift," 35 (1989), 74–88
Johnson, Loretta, "A Temporary Marriage of Two Minds: T. S. and Vivien Eliot," 34 (1988), 48–61
Johnston, Walter E., "Style in W. C. Williams and Charles Ives," 31 (1985), 127–36
Joyce, James, *see* Benstock, Berni; Degnan, James P.; Heusel, Barbara Stevens; Sailer, Susan Shaw; Siegel Carol; Spoo, Robert E.; Ungar, Andras P.

Kafka, Franz, *see* Wonham, Henry B.

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Kanaganayakam, C., "Zulfikar Ghose: An Interview," 32 (1986), 169–86
Kaplan, Carola M., "Absent Father, Passive Son: The Dilemma of Rickie Elliott in *The Longest Journey*," 33 (1987), 196–210
Kastely, James L., "Revolution and Isolation in *La Condition humaine*," 35 (1988), 458–79
Kaufman, Anthony, "The Short Fiction of Barbara Pym," 32 (1986), 50–57
Keener, Frederick M., "Barbara Pym Herself and Jane Austen," 31 (1985), 89–110
Kirkpatrick, B. J., "E. M. Forster's Broadcast Talks," 31 (1985), 329–41
Koestenbaum, Wayne, "*The Waste Land*: T. S. Eliot's and Ezra Pound's Collaboration on Hysteria," 34 (1988), 113–39
Kreps, Barbara, "How Do We Know That We Know What We Know in Tom Stoppard's *Jumpers*?," 32 (1986), 187–208

Lago, Mary, "Introduction: Forster on E. M. Forster," 31 (1985), 137–46
Law, Joe K., " 'We Have Ventured to Tidy up Vere': The Adapters' Dialogue in *Billy Budd*," 31 (1985) 297–314
Lawrence, D. H., *see* Markert, Lawrence W.; Sword, Helen
Leavell, Linda, "Nietzsche's Theory of Tragedy and the Plays of T. S. Eliot," 31 (1985), 111–26
Lesser, Wendy, "Murder as Social Impropriety: Paul Bowles's 'Evil Heroes,' " 32 (1986), 402–07
Lessing, Doris, *see* Arlett, Robert; Hite, Molly; Peel, Ellen
Lloyd, David, "The Public and Private Realms of Hill's *Mercian Hymns*," 34 (1988), 407–15
Lowell, Robert, *see* Axelrod, Steven Gould

McCall, Margaret, "*The Lonely Roads*: Notes for an Unwritten Book," 33 (1987), 382–94
Macaulay, Rose, *see* Guerinot, J. V.
McDowell, Colin, and Timothy Materer, "Gyre and Vortex: W. B. Yeats and Ezra Pound," 31 (1985), 343–67
MacGowan, Christopher, "Williams' Last Decade: Bridging the Impasse," 35 (1989), 389–405
MacNiven, Ian S., "Introduction: The Achievement of Lawrence Durrell," 33 (1987), 431–35
———. "Kay Boyle's High Country: *His Human Majesty*," 34 (1988), 363–74
———and Carol Peirce, "Introduction: Lawrence Durrell, Man and Writer," 33 (1987), 255–61
Malin, Irving, "An Anti-introduction," 32 (1986), 257–58
Malraux, André, *see* Kastely, James L.
Mann, Thomas, *see* Adair, William
Mansfield, Katherine, *see* Neaman, Judith S.
Markert, Lawrence W., " 'The Pure and Sacred Readjustment of Death': Connections between Lawrence Durrell's *Avignon Quartet* and the Writings of D. H. Lawrence," 33 (1987), 550–64
Marling, William, " 'Corridor to a Clarity': Sensuality and Sight in Williams' Poems," 35 (1989), 285–98
Materer, Timothy, *see* McDowell, Colin, and Timothy Materer
Meckier, Jerome, "Evelyn Waugh's 'Ryder by Gaslight': A Postmortem," 31 (1985), 399–409
Melville, Herman, *see* Law, Joe K.
Meyers, Jeffrey, "Hemingway's Primitivism and 'Indian Camp,' " 34 (1988), 211–22

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Millay, Edna St. Vincent, *see* Fried, Debra
Milosz, Czeslaw, *see* Airaudi, Jesse T.
Moore, Marianne, *see* Bar-yaacov, Lois; Grogan, Ruth A.
Morace, Robert A., "From Parallels to Paradise: The Lyrical Structure of Cheever's Fiction," 35 (1989), 502–28
Morrison, Ray, "Mirrors and the Heraldic Universe in Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet*," 33 (1987), 499–514
Morse, Deborah Denenholz, "*My Next Bride*: Kay Boyle's Text of the Female Artist," 34 (1988), 334–46
Moss, Marilyn, "The Child in the Text: Autobiography, Fiction, and the Aesthetics of Deception in *Without Stopping*," 32 (1986), 314–33
Murdoch, Iris, *see* Beams, David W.; Hague, Angela

Nabokov, Vladimir, *see* Dyer, Gary R.; Galef, David
Neaman, Judith S., "Allusion, Image, and Associative Pattern: The Answers in Mansfield's 'Bliss,' " 32 (1986), 242–54
Nichols, James R., "Ah—the Wonder of My Body, the Wandering of My Mind: Classicism and Lawrence Durrell's Literary Tradition," 33 (1987), 449–64
Nietzsche, Friedrich, *see* Leavell, Linda

Olson, Steven E., "Alien Terrain: Paul Bowles's Filial Landscapes," 32 (1986), 334–49

Peel, Ellen, "The Self Is Always an Other: Going the Long Way Home to Autobiography," 35 (1989), 1–16
Peirce, Carol, " 'Wrinkled Deep in Time': *The Alexandria Quartet* as Many-Layered Palimpsest," 33 (1987), 485–98; *see* MacNiven, Ian S., and Carol Peirce
Pinkerton, Mary, "Ambiguous Connections: Leonard Bast's Role in *Howards End*," 31 (1985), 236–46
Poe, Edgar Allan, *see* Pounds, Wayne
Porter, Katherine Anne, "Kay Boyle: Example to the Young (1931)," 34 (1988), 318–21
Pound, Ezra, *see* Bar-yaacov, Lois; Cheadle, Mary P.; Koestenbaum, Wayne; McDowell, Colin, and Timothy Materer; Roessel, David; Stoicheff, R. Peter
Pounds, Wayne, "The Subject of Paul Bowles," 32 (1986), 301–13
_____. "Paul Bowles and Edgar Allan Poe: The Disintegration of the Personality," 32 (1986), 424–39
Proust, Marcel, *see* Gilroy, James P.
Pym, Barbara, *see* Cooley, Mason; Kaufman, Anthony; Keener, Frederick M.
Pynchon, Thomas, *see* Vella, Michael W.

Queneau, Raymond, *see* Toloudis, Constantin

Reiman, Donald H., "A. R. Ammons: Ecological Naturalism and the Romantic Tradition," 31 (1985), 22–54
Roemer, Marjorie Godlin, "The Paradigmatic Mind: John Barth's LETTERS," 33 (1987), 38–50
Roessel, David, "The 'Repeat in History': Canto XXVI and Greece's Asia Minor Disaster," 34 (1988), 180–90
Rosenbaum, S. P., "Towards a Literary History of *Monteriano*," 31 (1985), 180–98
Roth, Henry, *see* Adams, Stephen J.

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Rountree, Mary Martin, "Paul Bowles: Translations from the Moghrebi," 32 (1986), 388–401
Ruskin, John, *see* Grogan, Ruth A.

Sailer, Susan Shaw, "A Methodology of Reading *Finnegans Wake*," 35 (1989), 195–203
Sayre, Henry M., "American Vernacular: Objectivism, Precisionism, and the Aesthetics of the Machine," 35 (1989), 310–42
Scigaj, Leonard M., "The Ophiolatry of Ted Hughes," 31 (1985), 380–98
Shahane, Vasant A., "Mrs. Moore's Experience in the Marabar Caves: A Zen Buddhist Reading," 31 (1985), 279–86
Siegel, Carol, " 'Venus Metempsychosis' and *Venus in Furs*: Masochism and Fertility in *Ulysses*," 33 (1987), 179–95
Simon, Richard Keller, "E. M. Forster's Critique of Laughter and the Comic: The First Three Novels as Dialectic," 31 (1985), 199–220
Simpkins, Scott, "Magical Strategies: The Supplement of Realism," 34 (1988), 140–54
Singh, Frances B., "*A Passage to India*, the National Movement, and Independence," 31 (1985), 265–78
Spanier, Sandra Whipple, "Kay Boyle: 'No Past Tense Permitted,' " 34 (1988), 245–57
Spencer, Sharon, "The Ambiguities of Incest in Lawrence Durrell's Heraldic Universe: A Rankian Interpretation," 33 (1987), 436–48
Spoo, Robert E., " 'Nestor' and the Nightmare: The Presence of the Great War in *Ulysses*," 32 (1986), 137–54
Stape, J. H., "The Unknown Angus Wilson: Uncollected Short Stories from the Fifties and After," 33 (1987), 80–97
Stengel, Wayne, "John Cheever's Surreal Vision and the Bridge of Language," 33 (1987), 223–33
Stewart, Jack F., "Color in *To the Lighthouse*," 31 (1985), 438–58
Stoicheff, R. Peter, "The Composition and Publication History of Ezra Pound's *Drafts & Fragments*," 32 (1986), 78–94
Stoppard, Tom, *see* Kreps, Barbara
Surette, Leon, "*The Waste Land* and Jessie Weston: A Reassessment," 34 (1988), 223–44
Swift, Graham, *see* Janik, Del Ivan
Sword, Helen, "Orpheus and Eurydice in the Twentieth Century: Lawrence, H. D., and the Poetics of the Turn," 35 (1989), 407–28

Tally, Ted, *see* Andreach, Robert J.
Taylor, Elizabeth, *see* Gillette, Jane Brown
Toloudis, Constantin, "The Impulse for the Ludic in the Poetics of Raymond Queneau," 35 (1989), 147–60
Tomlinson, Charles, *see* Grogan, Ruth A.

Uehling, Edward M., "Tails, You Lose: Kay Boyle's War Fiction," 34 (1988), 375–83
Ungar, Andras P., "Among the Hapsburgs: Arthur Griffith, Stephen Dedalus, and the Myth of Bloom," 35 (1988), 480–501
Updike, John, *see* Ahearn, Kerry

Vella, Michael W., "Thomas Pynchon's Intrusion in the Enchanter's Domain," 35 (1989), 131–46

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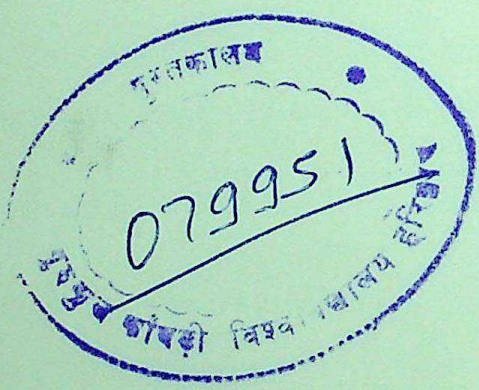
Wain, John, *see* Hague Angela
Waugh, Evelyn, *see* Hynes, Joseph; Meckier, Jerome
Weatherhead, Andrea K., "*Howards End*: Beethoven's *Fifth*," 31 (1985), 247–64
Weston, Jessie, *see* Surette, Leon
Wharton, Edith, *see* Dixon, Roslyn
Williams, Marcellette G., " 'Tea in the Sahara': The Function of Time in the Work of Paul Bowles," 32 (1986), 408–23
Williams, William Carlos, *see* Special issue, 35 (Fall 1989); Bremen, Brian A.; Johnston, Walter E.
_____. "The Somnambulists (1929)," 34 (1988), 313–17
_____. "The Baroness Elsa Freytag von Loringhoven," 35 (1989), 279–84
Wilson, Angus, *see* Stape, J. H.
Wonham, Henry B., "The Aborted Phone Call: Hasterer's Role in and out of *The Trial*," 35 (1989), 445–57
Woolf, Virginia, *see* Barrett, Eileen; Bishop, E. L.; Dick, Susan; Hulcoop, John F.; Stewart, Jack F.

Yeats, W. B., *see* Chadwick, Joseph; McDowell, Colin, and Timothy Materer

Zilboorg, Caroline, "Richard Aldington in Transition: His Pieces for *The Sphere* in 1919," 34 (1988), 489–506



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